COMPLETE
WORKS OF
GOSWAMI
TULSIDAS

RAMACHARITMANASA

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY

S.P. BAHADUR

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Complete Works of Goswami Tulsidas

Vol. I

Ramacharitmanasa

Ramacharitmanasa is the magnum opus of Tulsidas. It has the distinction of being the only work in Hindi which is widely accepted as a Scripture.

Translation of *Ramacharitmanasa* is difficult because its simple verses contain, as it were between their lines, theological expositions of the Rama symbol. The literal equivalent is sometimes unsuited to the theological intent. An attempt has been made in this translation to preserve the original without impairing the theological content. The serialization of *dohas* in the translation is according to *Ramacharitmanasa* published by Gita Press. Some parts of the original text not connected with the deeds of Rama have been abridged. Such *dohas* have not been serialized. It is hoped that this volume will stimulate in some measure devotion to Rama which Tulsi desired to convey.

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Vol. VI. Minor Works

ISBN 978–81–215–0634–2 (for the complete works)
ISBN 978–81–215–0635–9 (for vol. 1)
Reprinted 2008
First edition 1994

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Published by
Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
Post Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055, India

www.mrmlbooks.com

For having led me to the Divine Book which has unfolded to me a meaning and purpose of life, I dedicate this book in reverent gratitude to

the memory of my late father
Sri Iqbal Bahadur
to whom devotion in the name of Rama was the greatest strength in all the trials and turmoils that beset life during his sojourn on earth.

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PREFACE

Hundreds of books have been written on the wondrous deeds of Rama by scholars of erudite learning and sages of deep devotion, but none has sung of Rama as rapturously, as learnedly and as devotedly as Goswami Tulsidas in his *Ramayana,* or *Ramacharitmanasa* as he named it. Of all the chroniclers of the glorious deeds of Rama, this inspired apostle of the Lord alone succeeded in giving humanity an intimate perspective of Divinity which has made his *Ramacharitmanasa* the Holy Scripture for learned and unlettered alike.

This is the magic of Tulsidas and his immortal *Ramayana.* Never has profound learning been so plainly presented. While simple village folks sing verses of *Ramacharitmanasa* with devout ecstasy, learned savants deliver brilliant discourses on each of its verses. So ingenuous indeed are Tulsi's compositions in this respect that the learned are apt to miss the depth of their wisdom in a first reading of his mellifluent songs of the Lord, and it is only after repeated readings that the profundity of their purport shines forth lustrously.

This necessity of renewed and persevering application to derive a full measure of rapture Tulsi's *Ramayana* is of basic importance. It dawned upon me forty years ago when my father first asked me to read out some verses from the *Ramayana* for him. Since then each subsequent reading has brought forth new beauty, fresh fragrance, deeper devotion, clearer understanding, and more thrilling rapture in each verse of the great poet's *Ramacharitmanasa.*

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20 February, 1994

INTRODUCTION

Ramacharitmanasa of Goswami Tulsidas

Ramayana, which is the story of Rama, was first composed thousands of years ago by Valmiki, regarded as the Adikavi, or the first poet. In centuries which followed, the story of Rama was narrated by other apostles of the Lord.

Over four hundred years ago, Goswami Tulsidas wrote his *Ramayana* which he called *Ramacharitmanasa* or the Lake of the Deeds of Rama. Tulsi's work received wide acclamation. He was hailed as the 'Moon of Hindi literature' and Nabhaji in his *Bhaktimala* compared Tulsidas to Valmiki:

> In Tulsi, Valmiki comes again
> To bring hope in Kaliyuga profane.

A thousand million lustrous lines in Treta's *Ramayana* dazzle bright,
A sin most heinous to atone a single word of which has might.
Once more is born the bard of bards, holding aloft Devotion's light,
Enraptured in Rama's Lotus Feet, singing of His Deeds day and night,
As if his song provides the boat o'er tossing waves of life to ride.

> In Tulsi, Valmiki comes again,
> To bring hope in Kaliyuga profane.

Tulsidas revolutionised the concept of Divinity in Hindu Theology. Never had Divinity so identified Itself with humanity as in the Incarnated form of Rama in *Ramacharitmanasa,* and never has humanity so spontaneously surged towards Divinity as towards Lord Rama of Tulsidas. Sir George Grierson observed:

> One of the greatest reformers and one of the greatest poet India has produced, he disdained to found a church and contented himself with telling his fellow countrymen how to work out each his own salvation amongst his own kith and kin. Pandits may talk of Vedas and Upanishads, and a few may even study them; others may say that they find their faith in the Puranas, but to the vast majority of people of Hindustan, learned and unlettered alike, their sole norm of conduct is the Tulsikrita Ramayana.

In his *Ramacharitmanasa,* Tulsidas depicted Rama as the Poornavatara, or the Complete Incarnation of the Lord. Tulsi's Rama proclaimed that to be born human is a Divine Blessing which even the gods do not enjoy,[1] and that he had taken birth for the sake of His devotees.[2] He practised what he preached, adhering steadfastly to moral values and laying the noblest standards by his actions, regardless of suffering. Says Shankaranarayana:

> Sri Rama was a Poornavatara in a sense that other avataras, even that of Sri Krishna, were not. In every one of the earlier avataras, God was a visitant to the world and came whenever the ascendancy of vice made it imperative. He then returned to His Heavenly Abode satisfied that all was well with the world as inequity had been rooted out and right installed again. In none of them had god to share the joys and sorrows of mortal kind. Sri Ramavatara was pre-eminent over all the rest, for in it alone we meet with a suffering God whom suffering man can understand.

The response to *Ramacharitmanasa* of Goswami Tulsidas was immense. Tulsidas brought Rama to the people. Millions of homes in India both palatial houses of luxury and humble huts of mud and thatch are adorned with the Benign Form of Rama. Some pay reverence to Him as the Supreme Being, others worship Him as the Incarnation of Vishnu, but to all of them He represents the ultimate in human perfection. Homage is now paid to *Ramacharitmanasa* and its inspired author in many continents. There is hardly a Hindu home in India in which a copy of the *Ramacharitmanasa* will not be found and there is hardly a man, woman or child who has not heard the story of Rama contained in it.

Rama in Ramacharitmanasa

For the majority of people in northern India, the religious significance of Rama appeared in clear perspective only when Tulsidas presented the Deeds of Rama in his *Ramacharitmanasa,* some two thousand years after the story of Rama was first narrated by Valmiki. In the span of several centuries between Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Tulsi's *Ramacharitmanasa,* many *Ramayanas* and works based on the story of Rama emerged in which the deeds of Rama were glorified, but apart from the medieval *Adhyatma Ramayana,*[3] none of them attempted to define the religious significance of Rama in Hindu theology, until Tulsidas narrated the story of Rama in his *Ramacharitmanasa.* Thus the Rama tradition which took root, as it

[1] *RCM,* VII. 43.
[2] *RCM,* I. 192.
[3] *Adhyatma Ramayana* is considered to be the Uttara Kanda of *Brahmanda Purana.* Vedavyasa is regarded to be its author.

were, in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, grew in strength in a stately tree in *Adhyatma Ramayana* and blossomed forth in rapturous beauty to thrill hearts of human beings in *Ramacharitmanasa*. This growth of the Rama Tradition initiated in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, nurtured in *Adhyatma Ramayana* and established in *Ramacharitmanasa* as a popular symbol of worship, is of importance to evaluate the contribution of Tulsidas in the development of Ramology as the most vital factor of Hindu religion.

While accepting Rama as an Incarnation of Vishnu, the main theme of Valmiki's *Ramayana* was the depiction of Rama as the Perfect Man who adhered steadfastly and unswervingly to dharma as ordained in the Vedas and Upanishads. Rama thus became the symbol and embodiment of dharma. Valmiki was meticulous in his compositions to underscore this aspect on various occasions when events in the course of Rama's earthly life placed him in conflicting situations. Thus when Sita advised Rama to desist from unprovoked killing of demons in the Dandakya forests, as the act transgressed the dharma of one who was banished to live a hermit's life,[4] Rama firmly replied that he had vowed his assistance to sages living in the forests.[5] Examples may be multiplied in the discussions between Rama, Lakshmana and Sita on being conveyed the king's command for exile,[6] on the occasion of Rama killing Bali,[7] Sita's banishment after Rama's coronation,[8] and the tragic circumstances in which Rama renounced Lakshmana.[9] Thus Valmiki made a most significant and important contribution in Rama Tradition by projecting Rama as a symbol of dharma and perfection in human values. As far as Hindu Theology is concerned, Valmiki's *Ramayana* initiated Rama Consciousness which

[4]Hearken to me my warrior brave, let haste thee not inflame,
For slaying demons without cause, my love bear not the blame.
A Kshattriya warrior in the woods holds bow arrow in hand,
To answer call of those distressed, to help them ready stand.
Banished as hermit, hold not arms, mercy not strife thy dharma,
As hermits we are bid to live, in hermit's life be firm.
Those who bear weapons without cause, reason doth them forsake,
So lay thy arms till thou are here, in kingdom thine bow take.
Thou hast renounced thy kingdom, love, like sage in woods to live,
By dwelling thus to thy parents thou shall great pleasure give.
In dharma is welfare and by dharma in peace one e'er remains.
Dharma is alone essence of life, by dharma one all attains. — *VR*, III.9. 25-30

[5]Janaka's daughter! the sages' call for help when I had heard,
To end their woes by demons caused, I gave my solemn word.
Sita! my life I can forfeit, from you and Lakshmana part,
But words once trothed I cannot leave, for Truth is dear to heart. — *VR*, III.10 17-18

[6]*VR*, II. 31, 32.
[7]*VR*, IV. 16, 27.
[8]*VR*, VII. 45. 7 & 8, 12-16.
[9]*VR*, VII. 103. 14 & 15, 106.13.

us along the story of Rama, the great poet makes us eager participants in the events, while he subtly enlarges upon his religious theme. We are told of the exuberant rejoicings in Ayodhya on the birth of an heir to the kingdom's throne and we are reminded that the Lord has taken birth to redeem the woes of His devotees.[16] The poet describes Rama's childhood as he plays in the courtyard of Kaushilya's palace in verses of tender love, but he also records Kaushilya's prayer to be freed from Maya's spell.[17] We read of the romantic meeting of Rama and Sita in the gardens of King Janaka's palace and lest we get carried away by their emotional love, Tulsi reminds us that Rama does not pine for women.[18] With Sita we share her anxiety for success to Rama in stringing Shiva's mighty bow, and Tulsidas takes the opportunity to tell us that if Devotion is pure, success is inevitable.[19] While King Dashratha and the people of Ayodhya prepare joyfully for Rama's coronation, Tulsidas tells us that all times are auspicious to establish Rama as king (in our hearts).[20] The poet interspersses verses underscoring the religious significance of Rama as we share the grief of the people of Ayodhya on Rama's banishment, and follow Rama through his vacillating fortunes in the forests. The verses of the poet then throb with the war drums; but the Lord's Benign Mercy pervades the course of the grim war. Vibhishana named each warrior of the demon army as he was killed and the Lord granted him His Abode.[21] Kumbhakarana's spirit entered the Lord's body and he was granted His abode when he was killed.[22] Meghnad roared the names of Rama and Lakshmana, challenging them to fight even as he lay dying; it was enough for him to have taken their names and he earned salvation.[23] When Ravana, who was Rama's greatest foe, was vanquished, his spirit entered the Lord's body.[24] The reverses suffered by Rama's armies are held to be only manifestations of the Lord's Maya. When Kumbhakarana vanquished vanars in large numbers, the Lord who could summon Death by merely raising His eyebrows, was watching His Own Maya.[25] Rama suffered to let himself be bound by Meghnad in the snake noose out of His Own Maya.[26] Rama's prolonged battle against Ravana saw the annihilation of evil forces before Ravana was killed. His arrows were fruitless like de. ires of evil men;[27] all his manoeuvres fail like those of vile men who try to oppose virtue.[28] Ravana's heads were replaced by larger ones when struck by Rama's arrows like sense pleasures make passions grow.[29]

Thus Tulsidas takes us along the exciting course of battles of Lanka,

[16]*RCM*, I.192.
[17]*RCM*, I.202.
[18]*RCM*, I.280.3.
[19]*RCM*, I.258.3.
[20]*RCM*, II.2.
[21]*RCM*, VI.44.1-3.
[22]*RCM*, VI.71.
[23]*RCM*, VI.76.
[24]*RCM*, VI.102.5.
[25]*RCM*, VI.65.1.
[26]*RCM*, VI.72.6-73.
[27]*RCM*, VI.90.3.
[28]*RCM*, VI.91.2.
[29]*RCM*, VI.92.

describing the fury with which they were fought but reminding us that the purpose of the war was only to annihilate evil and not to take vengeance on evil doers. Apart from the narrative of the story of Rama, mellifluent hymns to the Lord and words of deep wisdom are strewn throughout the great epic. The magic of Tulsidas transforms an absorbing story of wondrous beauty into an epic of deep learning and a saga of human life in which Rama is subjected to all the vagaries of life on earth: pleasure and prosperity as well as trials and tribulations. He reminds us continuously that devotion to Rama allays all sufferings and brings peace to anguished hearts. Mankind has therefore been drawn towards Rama more as man towards man than as man towards God, and the reader of *Ramacharitmanasa* unconsciously starts equating his life with Rama's earthly life, deriving from it strength and comfort as he recalls vicissitudes of fortune and vagaries of emotions which Rama faced and which comprise life on earth.

Ramacharitmanasa must therefore be more than an epic and a saga of human life. It must be something more than the mere story of a wise and gentle prince whose wife was captured by a demon king against whom he fought a grim war to reclaim his lost love. Histories of nations are full of stories of famed kings who have come and gone, and fierce battles which have been fought and won. Wise kings have been praised and the cruel condemned. Many have been respected for upholding dharma and their memories are perpetuated in the annals of history. But their names have not become the dying words of kings and common men alike, nor have they become the sustainers of hope, the emblem of piety and the balms of distressed minds for generations of men through tumultous centuries of human existence.

Evidently, therefore, in *Ramacharitmanasa* Goswami Tulsidas succeeded in striking the resonance of Divinity in human hearts. This made his name immortal and his *Ramacharitmanasa* the Book Divine. Tulsidas had himself experienced the thrill of Divine Communion with his beloved Lord Rama in Chitrakoot, and for him the Deeds of Rama were the Deeds of God. Accordingly, when he narrated the story of Rama in the absorbing way in which he alone could do, the spirit of Divinity pervaded his verses and the rapture of Divine Love emanated from them.

This feature of *Ramacharitmanasa* is of fundamental importance. Throughout the engrossing action of the story, Tulsidas impresses upon his readers repeatedly that simple devotion to the Lord would lead to abiding peace on earth and to His Heavenly Abode hereafter. In singing of the glory of devotion to Rama, the great apostle of the Lord has drawn out the luster of devotion as only an inspired genius can do. The swift undercurrents of devotional ecstasy contained in *Ramacharitmanasa*

gush out in dazzling sprays of rapturous splendour. Therefore, to derive a full measure of ecstasy from the mellifluent verses of *Ramacharitmanasa.* it is necessary for the reader to attune himself to perceive the glorious form of Rama as the Incarnated God and *Ramacharitmanasa* as the Book Divine. The reader who does not do so will undoubtedly find vast treasures of beauty of language, poetry, adventure, emotions and dharma in its verses, but he will fail to be transported to ecstatic heights of Divine Effulgence which soothe the heart on reading them. He will miss the rapturous joy and devout peace which millions of people from time immemorial have derived from the Holy Name and Glorious Deed of Rama. He will fail to understand what Mahatma Gandhi, the great exponent of Truth, really meant when he said: 'When your passions threaten to get the better of you, go down on your knees and cry out to God for help. *Ramanama* is my infallible help'.

Structure of Ramacharitmanasa

Tulsi's *Ramacharitmanas* comprises seven sections or 'Kandas' as contained in the *Ramayana* of Valmiki and *Adhyatma Ramayana.* The first section, Bal Kanda, the Book of Childhood[30] contains (i) Invocation of gods, sages, the Holy Name of Rama and His Deeds; (ii) The Prologue, in which Tulsidas relates some events from the story of Shiva; birth of principal characters of the story, the tyranny of demons which led to the Earth's prayer for the Divine Incarnation; and (iii) Birth of Rama and the story of his childhood, Bal Kanda is followed by Ayodhya Kanda, the Book of Ayodhya;[31] Aranya Kanda, the Book of Forests;[32] Kishkindha Kanda, the Book of Kishkindha;[33] Sunder Kanda, the Book of Beauty;[34] Lanka Kanda, the Book of Lanka;[35] and Uttara Kanda, the Book of the North.[36] Uttara Kanda also contains the Epilogue of *Ramacharitmanasa.* The Epilogue is a unique and completely new concept of Tulsidas. It contains a comprehensive outline of philosophical aspects of Hindu religion in the form of sermons of Kakabhusundi addressed to Garuda, King of birds. These discourses are Kakabhusundi's answers to questions put to him by Garuda. At the conclusion of each answer, Kakabhusundi reiterates that Devotion to Rama is the sum and substance of all religious philosophy and religious pursuits. It is the infallible path to attain salvation and the means to be freed from earthly sufferings.

[30]Bala Kanda comprises 389 dohas: Invocation 58, Prologue 156, Story of Rama 175.
[31]Ayodhya Kanda comprises 326 dohas.
[32]Aranya Kanda comprises 55 dohas.
[33]Kishkindha Kanda comprises 32 dohas.
[34]Sunder Kanda comprises 63 dohas.
[35]Lanka Kanda comprises 151 dohas.
[36]Uttara Kanda comprises 215 dohas : Story of Rama 72, Epilogue 143.

The Epilogue of *Ramacharitmanasa* contains more dohas than in three Kandas of the work and comprises almost one-fifth of the total number of dohas in which the main story of Rama is narrated. An outline of its structure is given. After Shiva had completed narration of the story of Rama, he told his consort Parvati, that he had heard the Deeds of Rama from Kakabhusundi. Parvati asked Shiva how Kakabhusundi could attain Supreme Knowledge in the form of a crow. Shiva told Parvati how he had gone to a mountain in the Himalayas and had heard Rama's Deeds being narrated to Garuda by Kakabhusundi. He had also stayed there and heard the story of Rama.

Parvati was again puzzled. Garuda was himself the emblem of Knowledge. Why had he to go to Kakabhusundi to hear the Deeds of Rama? Shiva explained that Garuda had fallen victim to the same spell of Maya which afflicts people consumed with doubts. During the war of Lanka, Meghnad had made Rama and his vanar warriors captive in nooses of snakes.[37] Bramha had sent Gaurda to free them from their bonds.[37] Garuda fulfilled Bramha's commands but his heart was besieged with doubts as to how Rama, said to be Incarnation of Vishnu, could be bound and made to lie helpless on the battlefield? Garuda went to various gods to remove his doubts and Shiva ultimately directed him to Kakabhusundi.

When Garuda met Kakabhusundi, he heard the Deeds of Rama from him and his doubts were removed. Kakabhusundi solaced him and discoursed upon human failings and their becoming victims to the inexorable spells of Maya.[38] Kakabhusundi then quoted his own example in point.[39] He revealed the boons he had been granted by the Merciful Lord,[40] and the Lord's Personal Principles as disclosed to him by Rama Himself.[41]

Kakabhusundi then told Garuda how he had been born in Kaliyuga[42] and the curse he had received from Shiva for showing disrespect to his guru.[43] He narrated the circumstances in which he was cursed to be a crow in a subsequent birth[44] and the Divine Vision he beheld of Rama.[45]

Kakbhusundi's final discourse on Knowledge and Devotion thrilled Garuda with the rapture of devotion. 'The Vedas are like the Ocean', Kakabhusundi said, 'Mandrachal is Knowledge. Saints are gods who churn the Ocean and the nectar of Rama's Deeds is obtained which devotees of the Lord drink with bliss.[46] For devotees of the Lord, asceticism is the shield, Knowledge the sword to destroy Passions'.[47]

Garuda returned to Bramha's Abode, his doubts removed, singing the

[37]*RCM*, VI.72.6.
[38]*RCM*, VI.74A.
[39]*RCM*, VII.73B.1.
[40]*RCM*, VII.83A-85B.
[41]*RCM*, VII.85B.-87B.
[42]*RCM*, VII.96B.-102A.
[43]*RCM*, VII.106B.
[44]*RCM*, VII.112.
[45]*RCM*, VII.89A-82B.
[46]*RCM*, VII.120A.
[47]*RCM*, VII.120B.

glory of Rama. Shiva concludes the Epilogue hailing the Deeds of Rama, while Parvati sings of the glory of devotion to Rama.

Ramacharitmanasa is composed on the basis of four dialogues.[48] The first dialogue is between sage Yajnavalkya and Bharadwaj muni on the occasion of the Makar Sankranti bathing festival at Prayag. The muni requested the sage to narrate the Deeds of Rama and Yajnavalkya commenced by relating the story of Shiva which forms the Prologue of *Ramacharitmanasa.* The purpose of this diversion at the very outset from the main theme of the story of Rama which Bharad·vaj muni wanted to hear was threefold. Firstly, Tulsidas in his own inimitable way cautions those who have doubts regarding Rama's Divinity by commencing his Book Divine with the most eminent example of delusion of Maya effecting no less a deity than Shiva's Divine Consort Sati herself when she had doubts about Rama being the Incarnated Lord;[49] secondly, by renouncing Sati as his consort,[50] because she had assumed the form of Sita to put Rama's Divinity to test, Shiva himself paid the most exalted reverence to Rama and Sita—and Tulsidas hints that human beings should pay deepest reverence to One whom Shiva held in such eminent regard; thirdly, Shiva is introduced in the story as the narrator of the Deeds of Rama.

The second dialogue in *Ramacharitmanasa* is the story of Rama related by Shiva to Parvati. While Shiva narrates the story, he adds his own comments and interpretations on events at appropriate occasions. The third dialogue is referred to in the Epilogue of *Ramacharitmanasa.* After relating the Deeds of Rama, Shiva told Parvati that he had heard the story of Rama he had narrated from Kakabhusundi. No part of this dialogue in original is actually recorded in *Ramacharitmanasa,* but it is the basis of Shiva's narrative. Finally, the fourth dialogue recorded in *Ramacharitmanasa* is between Kakabhusundi and Garuda as contained in the Epilogue of the book.

The main story of Rama, contained in the dialogue between Shiva and Parvati is basically the same as recorded in versions of other authors of the *Ramayana;* but with the skill of a genius and the inspiration of a dedicated prophet, Tulsi abbreviated, transformed and altered sequences, and introduced incidents not mentioned by other narrators of the *Ramayana.* In spite of the brevity of his *Ramacharitmanasa* the legendary and allegoric references contained in the longer composition of Valmiki have been preserved. There is hardly a character or incident appearing in the longer poem that does not find place in *Ramacharitmanasa;* but Tulsidas perceived events from the devotional viewpoint, and he cut short elegant

[48]*RCM,* I.36.
[49]*RCM,* I.53.2-I.54.3
[50]*RCM,* I.56-I.56.1.

conversations of royal personages and gallant exchange of words between warriors on the battlefield. However, he sings in ecstasy of the hymns which sages addressed to the Lord. He transformed the narrative of Rama's gallant love in winning Sita into a rapturous story of Pure Divine Love. The magic of his art transformed Parashurama's tempestuous wrath into an engrossing incident of fiery anger, witty sallies and highest devotion.[51] Other narrators of the *Ramayana* were celebrated and gifted artists dedicated to their art. Tulsidas was dedicated to the Lotus Feet of Rama. Pervaded with the ecstasy of devotion, Tulsi also introduced events which are not contained in *Ramayanas* of other authors. He mentioned the incident of Hanuman being struck by an arrow from Bharat's bow[52] when he was carrying herbs to restore Lakshmana to life after he had been wounded by Meghnad in one of the battles of Lanka. In his inimitable way the great maestro hightens the suspense in the story and also illustrates the potent powers of devotion.[53]

It was the genius of Tulsidas and the fervour of his complete devotion to Rama that he was able to narrate the story of Rama in a manner not only different from versions already composed by illustrious sages, but also with an aura of Divine Bliss pervading his verses. It was inevitable that *Ramacharitmanasa* would be revered as the Divine Book.

Socio-Religious Significance of Ramacharitmanasa

In *Ramacharitmanasa* Tulsidas has aimed at a synthesis of all limbs of Hindu religion rather than propounding a new religious faith. He invoked all deities and paid deep homage to Vedas and Puranas. He imbibed the Rama Tradition from a wealth of available literature and his questing heart took him to long pilgrimages, seeking enlightenment from learned sages and devotees of the Lord. He waited for long years to let his mind mature in an understanding of the religious significance of Rama. When the understanding came to him, the Lord blessed him with His Divine Vision in Chitrakoot, a gift He rarely bestows upon mankind. Tulsi emerged firm in his faith and sincere in his convictions. 'One is my hope, one is my strength, in one is my reliance, faith' Tulsi proclaimed.[54] He found faith in devotion with a fervour seldom found in human beings. With loftiest devotion pervading his heart, Tulsi composed his *Ramacharitmanasa* depicting Rama as everything Divine: the Formless, All Pervading, Unborn, Absolute Bramha; the Incarnated Merciful

[51]*RCM*, I.268-I.285.
[52]*RCM*, VI.58.
[53]*RCM*, VI.59.3-VI.60A.
[54]*Dohavali*, 277.

Compassionate Rama; the Master even when he was a pupil,[55] Godliness Manifested into Worldliness;[56] and the Lord of Maya even when he suffered Himself to be afflicted by it. This concept of perceiving Divine Glory in all earthly phenomenon and surrendering all 'in mind, action and speech' to the Divine Lord is the central theme of *bhakti* projected in *Ramacharitmanasa* as the means of attaining salvation. It is heartening to the human being that Devotion as a way of religion as postulated by Tulsi is within scope of a practical everyday life. The common man finds encouragement from examples of persons from all walks of life to whom Rama has granted Mercy: the sinner Ahaliya,[57] meek and low caste Shabri,[58] the poor unlettered boatman,[59] and even his foes Kumbhakarna[60] and Ravana.[61]

As in religion, so also in society, Tulsi's outlook was inspired, bold and candid. He advocated a casteless and classless society in which all human beings were equally entitled to receive Divine Mercy. *Ramacharitmanasa* enjoins fundamental values of love, truth, kindness, purity and virtue woven together in the fabric of Devotion as qualities of mankind to merit salvation rather than caste, class or wealth. Rama of *Ramacharitmanasa* condemns social barriers and grants stature to the common man. The Compassionate arms of Tulsi's Rama embraced Guha,[62] the forest dweller, and sage Sutikshana[63] with equal warmth. Tulsi's Rama was the Champion of the meek and down trodden and the poet's verses are sharply critical of the greed, jealousy and pride of higher echelons of society. Tulsi depicts Rama as deeply concerned for the common man who is less gifted than the learned, and towards those human beings condemned by society to a baser standard of life because of their caste. He also underscores the selfless devotion of the poor and destitute to Rama in contrast to the selfish prayers of the affluent for their personal worldly gains. Tulsi draws these comparisons with skill and subtlety typical of his genius. This aspect of Rama's precepts is illustrated in *Ramacharitmanasa* in Tulsi's narrative of visits paid to Rama by people from different cross sections of society, when the Lord came to live in Chitrakoot during his exile.[64]

The first to come were gods, Digpals and Kinnars. They represented people of the highest level of society who enjoyed all comforts of life. They hastened to the Lord, sung of His Glory and hailed Him as their 'guardian'. They then narrated their woes and sorrows to Him and departed to their abodes, happy in their hearts. Significantly, there is no mention in *Ramacharitmanasa* of the Lord's reaction to the visit of the gods, and the

[55] *RCM*, I.208.4.
[56] *RCM*, III.23.1.
[57] *RCM*, I.210.4.
[58] *RCM*, III.35.7.
[59] *RCM*, II.102.
[60] *RCM*., VI.70.4.
[61] *RCM*, VI.102.5.
[62] *RCM*, VI.120.6.
[63] *RCM*, III.10.11.
[64] *RCM*, II.133-37.

poet subtly hints that the Lord was not impressed by the selfish purpose of their visit, only to bemoan their sorrow.

The next to come were munis and sages who represented the learned strata of society who engage themselves in an understanding of Divine phenomenon by Learning, penance, meditation, yajnas and yoga. They sing of His glory and wish him success in the purpose of the Divine Incarnation: to rid the earth of demons who hinder them in their quest for Divine Enlightenment. Rama greets them with regard and assures them that they may now perform their yajnas fearlessly. Though the sages hailed Rama as 'the fruit of their penance', the absence of the thrill of devotional resonance is apparent in Tulsi's verses.

Finally, kols and kirats who live in the forests, unknown to the world of wealth and comforts come to the Lord. They bring modest offerings of fruits and flowers of the woods and lay them silently at the Lord's Feet. They can only gaze at Him in devotional ecstasy. Rama reacts spontaneously to their love and talks kindly to the most beloved of His creation. Encouraged by the Lord's Grace, they hail Him and His consort as their 'parents' and make effusive offerings of assistance to them while they live in the woods. The Lord listens to them with love as parents would to little children. To them who had nothing to ask for and offered all that they had, the Lord gave His Divine Blessings.

On another occasion when the people of Ayodhaya came to meet Rama in Chitrakoot, there were touching reunions. Guha, the forest chieftain, who was of the lowest caste, then greeted Sage Vashisht,[65] who was the highest born amongst humans. As was customary, low caste Guha greeted Vashisht from a distance. Knowing he was Rama's devotee, Vashisht clasped him in his arms; as if, Tulsi says in deep meaningful words, Vashisht gathered in his hands, Love scattered on the ground by social traditions.

The *Ramacharitmanasa* postulates a socio-religious philosophy of toleration and equality, accepting all faiths and considering them all to be worthy of salvation. Tulsi's concept of Rama-Rajya thrilled the imagination of his countrymen. Mahatma Gandhi adopted it as his vision for Independence of India, and it served as the ideal for shaping the Constitution of the country in which the Lord had condescended to be born.

Ramacharitmanasa—A Dharmashastra

Tulsidas followed the Valmiki tradition of presenting the story of the Deeds of Rama as a Dharmashastra. The characters portrayed in the story

[65]*RCM,* II.242.3-243.

represent specific aspects of human values. Shiva, who is the narrator of the Deeds of the Lord is identified as *chaitanyarupa* or conscience of *jiva*, the soul. His consort Parvati, to whom the deeds are narrated, represents 'understanding'. Before narrating the glorious Advent of *Ramavatara*, Shiva in the role of Soul of the Individual conveys to Parvati (the recipient of 'comprehension'), the basic understanding of Immanence and Transcendence of the Supreme Spirit.[66] And then, as gods and humans besought the Supreme Spirit, the Divine Drama commences. To begin with, the Lord Who occupies all space chooses Ayodhya ('that which cannot be subdued by strife') as His home to wage the war against human passions which were destroying tranquillity of the heart. King Dashratha, identified as the ten *indriyas* of which the Lord took form, was His earthly father and his mother was Kaushilya, who was blessed with such knowledge of the Vedas that even as the Divine One was born of her womb, she quelled emotions of motherly love surging within her heart to pay obeisance to the Lord Who was born as her Son.[67]

Along with the Incarnation of the Lord, three other Divine forms appeared: Lakshmana, representing Knowledge; Bharat, the symbol of unqualified Devotion, and Satrughan, the personification of *Karma*, devoted to Truth and Reality.

The purpose of the Divine Incarnation is defined with clarity when Vishwamitra, symbolising yearnings of Righteousness in the world, exhorts[68] King Dashratha, absorbed in yearnings of earthly love,[69] to part with Rama, to redeem the fears of those engaged in righteousness. Fettered in the chains of Maya, Dashratha declines. Vashisht, representing Discernment prevails over the king; Rama and Lakshmana go to keep guard over the yajna, which symbolises Knowledge of Bramha. The demoness Taraka, personifying Greed and Avidity is killed by the Lord.[70]

Rama is married to Sita, daughter of the Earth, personifying Primal Prakriti and the Supreme Spirit is united with His Maya.

Instigated by Manthara, representing Evil and Craftiness, Kaikeyi, depicting virtue misled by earthly longings, becomes instrumental in Rama's banishment to the forests for fourteen years.[71]

Rama's banishment symbolises the highest quality in human life: accepting adversity without being swayed by emotions and steadfastness in duty regardless of sacrifices one may be called upon to make. Bharat, the symbol of Devotion, rejects the earthly glory of Ayodhya's Crown[72] and goes to meet Rama, the Supreme Spirit, in the forests of Chitrakoot.

[66] *RCM*, I.184.3,4.
[67] *RCM*, I.191.2,3.
[68] *RCM*, I.206.5.
[69] *RCM*, I.207.1-3.
[70] *RCM*, I.208.3.
[71] *RCM*, II.28.2.
[72] *RCM*, II.178.1.

King Janaka, the personification of Learning and Detachment, also meets Rama in Chitrakoot and witnesses the greatest manifestation of Devotion in the form of Bharat. The rapturous thrill of Devotion pervades his heart[73] and he regrets having come to Chitrakoot to give his counsel of Learning and Detachment in the environment of highest devoted Love.[74]

The great story moves on. Lakshmana disfigures Surpnakha,[75] who is the embodiment of Lust. The two brothers overwhelm the demons Khara and Dushana[76] who correspond to Wild Excitement and Insane Frenzy.

Thereafter, Ravana, personifying Ego, appears and abducts Sita who now assumes the form of Maya.[77] As Ravana speeds his way to Lanka, Jatayu, symbolising Self-respect challenges the evil-doer,[78] but Vice spurns self-respect in its overpowering madness of vile intent. Sita is carried away to Lanka, where she becomes the symbol of Purity and Steadfast Devotion to her Lord. Rama plays the role of the inconsolable and suffering human, but firm in dharma and unfailing in duty. His travels in the forests take him to Kishkindha where he meets Sugriva, the deposed vanar king who symbolises Friendship and Hanuman who represents the Vital Breath.[79]

The stage for redemption of mankind from oppression of evil forces is now set. We have first Vibhishana, brother of the demon king, representing the faculty of Good Conduct seeking shelter of the Lord.[80] Thereafter we witness the terrible battles of Lanka in which forces of evil are overwhelmed: Atikaya, representing Inebriety; Kumbhakarna, symbolising Disregard of Spiritual Convictions; Meghnad, the embodiment of Wrath, and finally the mighty Ravana depicting Ego. Ultimately, Rama, the Lord of the Universe is united again with Sita, the Primal Prakriti.

Divinity had chosen to play the drama of a human role, subjecting Itself to human emotions, facing turmoils of human life, but emerging unscathed by human failings and adhering resolutely to dharma. Tulsidas succeeded in portraying this chosen role of Divinity in such abounding measure that his *Ramacharitmanasa* became both a religious scripture and a Dharmashastra, a code of ethics for millions and millions of men and women through generations of human existence. Commenting on this aspect of Tulsi's *Ramacharitmanasa,* Dr. Smith has observed:

> 'The morality of the poem is as lofty as the theology and there is not an impure word or idea in it from beginning to end. Rama's wife Sita is dépicted as the ideal of womanhood. The poem is to the Hindus of

[73]*RCM*, II.287.3.
[74]*RCM*, II.291.1 & 2.
[75]*RCM*, III.17.
[76]*RCM*, III.20B.
[77]*RCM*, III.28.
[78]*RCM*, III.28.6.
[79]*RCM*, IV.2.3 & 3.2.
[80]*RCM*, V.41.

Northern India even more than the *Bible* to ordinary British Christians.

Characterization in Ramacharitmanasa

No book in the world has such a galaxy of characters as are found in the *Ramacharitmanasa*. There are mighty kings like Janaka and Dashratha who were respected far and wide, and of whom Sita had said: 'Thousand of crowned kings bow to my father. The fame of the glory of my father-in-law is known in the fourteen worlds.'[81] There are loving mothers and crafty queens, learned sages and gallant warriors, simple village folks and humble devotees of the Lord. There are wicked demons and oppressors of righteousness, some of whom were vanquished while others who sought Mercy received the Lord's Divine Grace.

When Tulsidas wrote his *Ramacharitmanasa* he undoubtedly had the story of Rama as narrated by the great poet Valmiki as guideline. But the semblance between Tulsi's work and that of his celebrated predecessor ends with the common theme. The mantle of Divinity Tulsi casts on characters of *Ramacharitmanasa* makes the part they play more exacting, the Divine aura making them symbols of perfection. Thus while Valmiki in his portrayal of Rama presents him as a wise and righteous prince, dedicated to the cause of Truth and virtue, but not without moments of impatient anger, Tulsi's Rama is the Benign and Compassionate Lord in mortal form. Accordingly, in the earthly life of the Heavenly God, Tulsi equates his human life to perfection. Other characters of his *Ramacharitmanasa* are also portrayed to fulfil their respective roles to flawless and ideal standards. Tulsidas set for himself the difficult task of narrating the story of Rama, preserving the basic concept of idealism translated into action. He fulfilled his aim as only a genius could do. The story of Rama is intensely human, fraught with vicissitudes of fortunes, triumphs and turmoils that beset human life. Constantly aware of the Divinity of his characters, Tulsi unfolds perfection in their approach and reactions to intricate human problems which confront them.

Tulsi's delineation of characters achieves the rare distinction of preserving an approach to perfection in all situations even when the basic nature of the character would dictate otherwise. Fiery anger in the face of injustice or vice, for instance, was characteristic of Lakshmana. Tulsi portrays this quality vividly on various occasions: when Parashurama spoke scathingly in the assembly of princes at Janakapur,[82] when Bharat approached Chitrakoot with Ayodhya's armies,[83] when Sugriva became indifferent to the words he had trothed to Rama in Kishkindha.[84] But in *Ramacharitmanasa,* Lakshmana refrains from giving vent to his wrath on

[81] *RCM*, II.97.1 & 2.
[82] *RCM*, I.269.2.
[83] *RCM*, I.229-230.
[84] *RCM*, IV.18.4-19.

other occasions: when he heard of the injustice of Rama's banishment,[85] and when the Sea god would not listen to Rama's entreaties to let the vanar armies cross over to Lanka.[86] On these latter occasions, Lakshmana's inherent wrath came into conflict with his unquestioned obedience and steadfast devotion to Rama. With subtle delicacy, Tulsidas adheres to delineation of both of Lakshmana's characteristics without compromising perfection, Rama's impetuous and irascible brother keeps calm in deference to devotion to Rama, but later signifies his wrath on appropriate occasions: on Sumentra's return to Ayodhya in the first case,[87] and in his irrepressible jubilation when Rama picked up his bow and arrow to dry the ocean[88] in the second case.

We have another touching example of Tulsi's delicacy of characterisation on the occasion of Dashratha's parting with his beloved son Rama when he was ready to proceed to the forests on exile. By the unpredictable course of Destiny, words of a loving husband became the command of banishment for his beloved son. With delicate fineness Tulsi narrates this part of the story without the grief stricken king having to pronounce the cruel words himself. Being the upholder of Truth, Dashratha could not retrace from the boons he had granted to his erring wife; but he loved his son more than his life and could not bear to be parted from him. The beauty of Tulsi's art of characterisation dazzles forth in all its brilliance when he portrayed anguished Dashratha praying to Shiva[89] to contrive to prevent Rama from going to the forests. The great Tulsidas depicted Dashratha to be prepared to bear the infamy of the verdict of disgrace of a mighty monarch having been disobeyed, but unable to forsake dharma of Truth even if it, meant his certain death, Dashratha's illustrious son's unswerving faith in Truth matched the heartbroken king's own dedication to dharma. Rama was aware of the injustice of misguided Kaikeyi's asking for his banishment. He was confident that the king, his brothers and the people of Ayodhya would stand by him solidly if he chose to disregard the king's trothed words. Yet he calmly donned the hermit's dress and proceeded to the forests for fourteen years on the very day he would have been coronated as Crown Prince. Tulsi's delineation of the character of Dashratha and Rama is indeed as glorious a tribute to dharma and Truth as has ever been penned by a literary genius.

Ramacharitmanasa is full of episodes in which principles of duty apparently come in conflict with action. Without evading the issues, Tulsidas faces such occasions squarely and proceeds to unravel them without any compromise with perfection in the actions of his characters.

[85] *RCM*, II.69.1-3.
[86] *RCM*, V.50.2 & 3.
[87] *RCM*, II.95.2.
[88] *RCM*, V.57.1-3.
[89] *RCM*, II.43-44.

Sita's insistence on accompanying Rama on exile,[90] her stern words to Lakshmana when he hesitated to go to Rama's assistance when she thought he was in need of help in Panchvati,[91] and Rama's slaying of Bali[92] are some examples in which Tulsidas preserved the consistency of harmony of characterisation. He has shown with unmistakable dramatic skill that the characters of his Divine Book have adhered to the highest principles of which they are the symbols, even if their actions were liable to be misconstrued apart from the principles they represented.

Tulsi's art of consistency in characterisation is manifest throughout his *Ramacharitmanasa.* The basic qualities of his characters are described in nascent form in their early lives and these latent traits appear persistently as the story develops along intricate and thorny paths on which life's journey has to be trod. Thus it was the magnanimous Rama who won at games in his childhood but conceded victory to Bharat,[93] who later left Ayodhya's kingdom to Bharat, Kishkindha to Sugriva, and the wealth of Lanka to Vibhishana.

Though Tulsidas highlighted the specific quality of his characters of which they were the symbols, he did not overlook other qualities which they possessed and he brought them out as the narrative moved on. So complete indeed is his exposition of human qualities, that there is hardly a trait of human nature that is not illustrated by him. This makes his *Ramacharitmanasa* a veritable book of reference for ethics apart from being the Book Divine.

Poetic Content of Ramacharitmanasa

Tulsidas made a bold departure from established traditions of poetry of the mediaeval period in the choice of the language of his works. Sanskrit was the conventional medium of expression of Hindu religious philosophy. When Tulsidas chose Avadhi a colloquial language familiar to a large majority of people of Northern India, for composing his *Ramacharitmanasa,* he was derided by learned scholars. Tulsidas heard his critics nonchalantly and unperturbed by their criticism, freely borrowed words from other languages also, blending them into the music of his verses. He countered his critics with disarming simplicity: 'Neither Sanskrit nor art of words, but true love one must have indeed,' he observed in Dohavali, 'To ward the cold if blanket serves, of costly rugs where is the need ?'[94]

In *Ramacharitmanasa,* Tulsidas declares that he is not gifted with the

[90]*RCM,* I.64.1-4.
[91]*RCM,* III.27.3.
[92]*RCM,* IV.8.3.
[93]*Gitavali,* 45.7.
[94]*Dohavali,* 572.

arts of poetry, but his verses have the virtue of bearing Rama's Glory. Tulsi's humility behoved his devout love for Rama; nevertheless, he ranked above the poets of his age and of all ages, in the beauty of his verses. Allchin has observed:

> The magic of Tulsi's language, with its astonishing array of vocabulary—learned and Sanskrit at one extreme, popular homely even Muslim loaned words at the other, controlled use of racy idiomatic language, larded with popular maxims and phrases, and of polished compounds and figures of speech, might well grace any textbook of Indian Poetics.

Amongst the outstanding qualities of Tulsi's poetic genius was his deep understanding of Nature and its skilful blending into the magic of his verses. Ever since poetry was written, Nature has been the source of inspiration for poets to adorn their compositions with vibrant beauty. Tulsidas followed this tradition. He chose the highest symbols of beauty from Nature but considered them imperfect when compared to Divine Glory. He created an environment of exquisite beauty around the glow of Divine Radiance but with the delicacy of a devout devotee artist, he did not permit earthly colours to touch the aura of Divinity. When describing the enthralling beauty of the Divine characters of *Ramacharitmanasa* he adhered to codes of traditional poetry but kept his Divine characters above earthly standards by indirect use of symbols of beauty. When Rama, for instance, distraught by Sita's disappearance from their hermitage at Panchvati, yearned for her with all the earthly emotions of a human lover, Tulsi depicts Rama recalling in his heart the perfection of her exquisite beauty. But the great poet desists from likening Sita's loveliness directly to traditional symbols. Sita was Divine and nothing on earth could bear comparison with her. With his inimitable skill, Tulsidas depicts Rama sighing a soliloquy to Sita imploring her to return to him, telling her that Beauty which lay humbled while she graced the forests, now flaunted their charms with impunity.[95]

In moments of inspired rapture Tulsidas even rejected traditional symbols. While depicting love stricken Rama gazing at the moon after he had met Sita in King Janaka's gardens, Tulsi's Rama denounces the beauty of the moon. 'The queen of the night,' Rama exclaimed, 'is not to be compared to Sita. The moon was born of the salty Ocean and Poison is her brother. She grows dim by day and her beauty waxes and wanes by night. She causes the chakva to moan and the lotus to wither. O moon! thou art full of faults. It is a sin to compare Janaka's daughter to thee!'[96]

[95]*RCM*, III.29.5-7.
[96]*RCM*, I.236.4-I.237.2.

Throughout his writings, Tulsidas composed his verses with rare and masterful skill, drawing upon changing moods of nature to make his lines pulsate with emotions just as he wished them to do: sweet as a cuckoo's song, gay as lively Spring or pathetic like the importunate notes of the chakva. He had an intimate communion with Nature developed during the course of his extensive journeys to pilgrimages located in the most enchanting natural environments. Being a keen observer he imbibed the spirit of life in various moods from Nature. But steadfast in devotion to Rama he perceived in Nature only the Majesty of Rama. It was inevitable that his verses of Rama would throb with the spirit of Nature. Thus in the sweet music of the cuckoo's voice, Tulsi heard songs being sung to the Glory of Rama; and in the dark spots on the moon, he perceived the reflection of the sky blue Image of Rama.[97]

So deep indeed was his devotion to Rama and so profound his knowledge of Nature that in his verses of the Deeds of Rama, Tulsi makes Nature reflect the trend of the story with subtle delicacy, underscoring the predominant glory of Divinity over the Maya of His creation. Thus while describing Rama's journey from Ayodhya to the forests on his banishment, Tulsi declares: 'Clouds gave him shade and gods showered blossoms from the heavens as Rama proceeded on his way, wrapt in beauty of the lovely hills, the woods, its birds and deer'.[98]

When they reached Chitrakoot, Tulsi's Lakshmana describes the place thus: 'The ravine bends around this spot like a bow with river Mandakini as the bowstring'.[99] With subtle skill Tulsi describes the beauty of the natural surroundings of Chitrakoot in words which ring ominously of the purpose of Rama's sojourn in the forests.

In his description of the life of Rama and His Divine Consort in Chitrakoot, Tulsi depicts Nature's obeisance to the Divine Incarnation in beautiful verses. 'Ever since Rama took his abode there,' he sings 'the woods became bounteous in comforts. Every kind of tree blossomed and bore fruit; flowery creepers formed pleasant and beautiful canopies; Swarms of bees buzzed and the breeze blowed cool gentle and fragrant; Birds charmed ears with sweet music; elephants, tigers, and deer sported together.'[100]

Similarly, when Tulsi described Bharat's journey to Ayodhya on being summoned there after Rama's banishment and King Dashratha's death, he makes Nature share the agony of the young prince's heart. 'Ponds and rivers had lost their beauty,' Tulsi tells us, 'songs of birds were not heard.

[97]*RCM*, VI.12A.
[98]*RCM*, II.113.
[99]*RCM*, II.132.1.
[100]*RCM*, II.136.3-II.137.

Even horses pranced listlessly.'[101]

Tulsi's skill in blending Nature's varying moods with human emotions is beautifully illustrated in the Book of Kishkindha of *Ramacharitmanasa.* He sings of the changing seasons and their effects on the verdant woods, its flowers and its birds, its grounds and its rivers, likening the changes to vacillating fortunes of life, its vices and its virtues.[102] Tulsi indeed manifests himself in these verses as a connoisseur of Nature and as a genius of expressing human emotions.

There is another aspect of Tulsi's mastery over expression of human emotions in terms of Nature which underlines his poetic genius and places him apart from other poet's of his age. Tulsi wrote for the common man and he chose similes and metaphors that are familiar to the common man. He refers to village ponds[103] and the lotus blooms which grow in them;[104] green fields of rice[105] and hailstones which damage them;[106] slush on village paths[107] and collyrium which they apply to their eyes.[108] Innumerable such references occur frequently in his verses. These homely aspects of Nature, so familiar to the common man, convey thoughts and emotions which the poet wishes to express with unfailing clarity. He transformed most prosaic subjects into exquisite poetry, so that while his less gifted readers are benefitted by the clarity of his expression, those who seek beauty in his verses are amazed at the skill and genius of the great poet of the people.

Ramacharitmanasa is composed in verses comprising slokas, dohas, sorthas, chaupais and chands. The Invocatory verses and hymns sung to the Lord by sages and gods are generally composed in slokas which are written in Sanskrit. Dohas are couplets interspaced between chaupais and are skilfully composed to emphasis the salient points in the narrative or to express religious viewpoints or to sing of Rama's Glory. Sorthas are similar to dohas except that the rhyme is ingeniously introduced within each line of the couplet instead of at the end. The main narrative is composed in chaupais which are four line verses comprising two short couplets. Chaupais comprise more than two-thirds of the verses contained in *Ramacharitmanasa.* Chands are beautifully composed verses comprising long lines of lyrical beauty. The musical effect of the verses is often accentuated by repeating the rhymes. They vibrate with devotional ecstasy or emanate rapturous joy according to the context of the narrative.

Tulsi ranks amongst the world's greatest poets in the majestic sweep of his vocabulary. He used words skilfully often capable of more than one

[101] *RCM*, II.157.2-4.
[102] *RCM*, IV.13.
[103] *RCM*, I.84.1.
[104] *RCM*, I.36.2.
[105] *RCM*, I.35.4.
[106] *RCM*, I.3B.4.
[107] *RCM*, I.6.4.
[108] *RCM*, I.1.

interpretation, each as befitting as the other in the context in which they are used. Different meanings of his verses are so profoundly deep that scholars have made intensive studies into the intent of the great poet and have marvelled at his vast learning. He used all the artifices of language to make his writings incomparably brilliant and consistently enchanting, fresh and lively from the first to the last line of his work. He wielded the pen of a genius, adding flourishing richness by introducing sweet sounding alliterations, pleasant rhymes, striking metaphors and enthralling personifications.

Tulsi achieved in abounding measure Abercrombie's criteria for poetry:

> Poetry is the communication of experience. But there is only one way for a man to communicate his experience to another, and that is to make it happen over again in the other man's mind by rousing and controlling his imagination. Words that merely tell us what the experience was are not poetry: poetry consists of words which can transport the experience alive into our minds and make it veritably our experience as well as the poet's.

Any reader of Tulsidas will readily agree that the great inspired poet described qualities and emotions with precision. His poetic expression, and their music, sways the hearts of his readers in resonance with the emotions and experiences contained in his narrative.

Relevance of Ramacharitmanasa in the Present Times

During the present times, the aspect of Divinity is being put to severe analysis. It is a period in which the impossibles are being made possible. In the wake of aweinspiring achievements, man is assured that the human being is capable of doing anything and everything. As mysteries of the Universe gradually come within human comprehension, more and more of the 'whys' of the world are being answered, and for the remaining ones, reasons would be forthcoming as and when imperfections of human knowledge are perfected. The Divine world is being transformed into a Man's world and human beings threaten to hold Divinity's creation to ransom through fearful and potent weapons created by man. But the fact remains that, though we have found reasons and have explored the majestic realms of the Universe, we are still unaware of the Primeval cause of life contained therein. We will in times to come, witness more aweinspiring spectacles of human capability, but we will be discovering only, in breathless wonder, the multifarious strands of the web of Maya. Life death cycles, oscillating since Time immemorial shall continue to remind mankind that there is a Primeval Cause which is of Divine Order.

We are today at the crossroads of Destiny. Human endeavour has created the potentialities for destruction of the 'three worlds' of the concept of *Ramacharitmanasa.* The need of the hour is of wisdom more than intellect, of humility more than the arrogance of power.

Shall we strive to be like Rama who held the power to destroy the three worlds, but did not use it even when faced with the terrible possibility of Sita, for whom the war of Lanka was being waged, having been killed by the demon king? Or shall the inebriation of Ego lead us to be like Ravana, who used all the powers bestowed to him by the gods: the rockets, deadly missiles, shaktis, to help him attain the fulfilment of his lust?

The world has its sages: its Vashishts and Shatanandas; it has its brave warriors for good or evil ends: its Lakshmanas, Meghnads, Kumbhakaranas; it has its nuclear bombs and missiles; it has its multitudes of people: peaceful like those of Ayodhya, crafty like Manthara, misguided like Kaikeyi, cruel like demons.

We do not have Rama amidst us in his earthly form. The gentle wise discerning Rama: Shelterer of the oppressed and Ocean of Mercy!. Yet we have the spirit of Rama amidst us. His Divine, All Pervading, Omnipresent, Immanent spirit, eternally seeking hearts of His devotees, eager to give peace to those who seek it, to give Bliss to those who have faith in His Divine Mercy.

Tulsidas has communicated that Benign Spirit of Rama to humanity in his *Ramacharitmanasa.* He has brought Divinity to the doorsteps of common men, lettered or unlettered, afflicted with sorrows or blessed with happiness. He has brought the Name of Rama upon their lips, the Bliss of righteousness in their conscience, and ecstasy of devotion in their hearts. His Book Divine is a great epic of righteousness and the easy way to attain salvation by hearkening to the Word of God. Its golden verses contain simple words of infinite wisdom to give us hope for the future, strength in the present, the Will to make peace possible, and pleasure in finding a meaning and purpose of life during its brief sojourn on earth.

The future beckons.

May the Merciful Rama guide us to bring peace to all humanity.

BOOK ONE

BALA KANDA

(The Book of Childhood)

I. THE INVOCATION

Who words, expression, melody gives, Who to the worlds welfare provides,
I blessings of Ganesha beseech, may goddess Saraswati be my guide. 1 Sl
Bhawani Shankar I beseech Who are the forms of Faith, Belief,
E'en those enlightened sans their grace, cannot the Lord in Self perceive. 2 Sl
To guru who is like Shankara, Learning's Store, who steadfast remains,
I humbly bow, for by his grace e'en crescent moon honour attains. 3 Sl
Who dwell enthralled in hallowed woods of perfect Deeds of Sita Rama,
I hail immortal bard Valmiki and bow to vanar god Hanuman. 4 Sl
The power which creates, sustains, destroys, Who welfare gives and woes redeems,
With folded hands I humbly bow to Sita, Rama's beloved queen. 5 Sl
Whose Maya doth the worlds pervade, Bramha gods asuras deluded makes,
Whose power projects this world as real, as rope appears to be a snake,
Whose Holy Feet alone are boat for those who seek Life's Sea to cross,
Hari, the Lord Who is called Rama, I bow to Him all causes' Cause. 6 Sl
As Vedas Puranas the thrilling deeds recount
Songs which in Ramayanas and texts abounds,
In simple words the Glory of Rama's Deeds,
To make heart pure, to sing Tulsi too seeks. 7 Sl
Whose thought fulfilment brings, the lord of hosts with elephant's head,
Tulsi his glory sings, Abode of Qualities, Wisdom's Home. 1 So
Whose Mercy makes dumb speak, disabled can scale mountain peaks,
Hari's Grace Tulsi seeks, Whose Bounty Burns all Kaliyuga's sins. 2 So
Form like blue lotus sprays, His eyes like lotus red in bloom,
In Milky Ocean stays, may Narayana dwell in my heart. 3 So
Like *kund* Moon dazzling fair, Mercy's Abode Uma's delight,
For meek who love doth bear, Kama's slayer may his Mercy grant. 4 So
I bow to guru's feet, Mercy's Sea, god in human form,

Like Sun's rays is his speech, to darkness of Maya dispel. 5 So

1. INVOCATION OF GODS, SAGES AND HUMANS

In human form who is like god, I bow to guru's lotus feet,
Attachment's darkness to dispel, like sunlight is his gentle speech.

I bow to dust of guru's feet,
Which is with fragrant love replete.
Like life-herb's powder it is sweet,
All worldly pains and grief to treat.

Like ash that Shiva's body doth bear,
It brings sweet pleasure and welfare.
It cleans the mirror of the mind.
Who honours it, no ties can bind.

Nails of guru's feet shine like gem,
Divine the bliss on seeing them.
Their brilliance ignorance destroys,
Who seeks their light good fate enjoys.

Their lustrous light opens soul's eyes,
Thus earthly woe and distress flies.
Rama's Deeds like diamonds, rubies shine,
Seen on the earth or deep in mine.

Like a devoted scholar wise, applying collyrium to his eye,
Percieves in mountains woods and dales, treasures that hidden lie. 1

So is the dust of guru's feet,
Collyrium worldly ills to treat.
Applied to eyes, discernment bring,
Songs of Rama's Deeds I will now sing.

With a happy heart and deep affection, I first greet saints who are abodes of virtues. Their nature resembles that of the cotton plant: devoid of desires of sense pleasures, like the dry cotton pod; free from darkness of ignorance and sin like whiteness of cotton; full of good qualities like fibres of cotton. They endure hardships but protect others against vice even as cotton bears the ordeal of ginning, beating, threading and weaving yet serves others by clothing their bare bodies.

Saints' company brings sweet bliss, welfare,
As if Prayag itself comes there.
Like Ganga, Rama's devotees fare,
Like Saraswati, Bramha's Learning bear.

Like Yamuna to end Kaliyuga's sins,
To actions, precepts of dharma brings.
Triveni of Shiva Vishnu's songs,
Brings thrill to those who thither throng.

Like Akshayawat faith in dharma's creed,
The servers there earn fruits of deeds.
Such fates in all times, end of woes,
He finds whose heart towards saints goes.

On such Prayag-like saints who dwells, hears them with happy hearts,
Earns life's four fruits awhile he lives, from earthly woes he parts. 2
Hail to all saintly men, who regard friend and foe with equal mind,
Being kind to all, like flowers imparting fragrance to all mankind. 3a
Knowing their gentle hearts, spontaneous love, desire for peace
Humbly I beseech: 'Grant me devoted love for Rama's Feet'. 3b

Now truly, I greet wicked men.
Who will oppose their only friend.
In others' loss who see their gain,
Distress in welfare, joy in pain.

Like Rahu for Lord's moonlike face,
With keenness faults in others trace.
Seeing others' flaws with thousand eyes,
Their virtue seek to taint like flies.

Like fire to burn, Yamaraj in wrath,
Like Kubera rich in vice's path.
Like Ketu star, their growth is grief,
Like Kumbhkarana, peaceful when asleep.

Those caring not for their own,
Are keen to wreck another's home.
Like frozen hail which on field drops,
Melts itself, but injures crops.

I greet them for their thousand ears,
All turned towards others' failures.
Searching faults with thousand eyes,
Seeking to weave webs of lies.

When others flourish, such men of jealous nature are oppressed,
With folded hands I humbly beg them: 'Kindly leave me unpossessed'. 4

Though humbly them I thus implore,
To hinder they will still explore.

A vulture given love and care,
Will not forsake its raw meat fare.

To saints and evil men I pray,
Both bring sorrow in their own way:
One leaves us sad when he departs,
The others' advent pains our hearts.

They're born alike, same goal to reach,
Yet differ like lotus and leech.
They are like elixir and wine,
Both came from churning of the brine.

Good men chose virtue, wicked vice.
Reaping fruit of actions likewise.
Good and bad traits are known to all,
But each follows his own heart's call.

The righteous follow virtue's path, the wicked choose to dwell in vice,
Nectar is praised for giving health, poison for strength in taking life. 5

A saint's kindness, wicked man's deed,
One fathoms not, like oceans deep.
Yet we must know both to decide,
To virtue seek, and reject vice.

Of Brahma are equal born all men,
But by their deeds Vedas define them.
The Vedas, Puranas and history say,
Both good and evil hold their sway.

Good deeds and sins; pleasures and pains;
Dark nights, bright days; sinners and saints;
Gods and demons; the high and low;
Brahma, Maya; want and riches glow;

Beggar and king; heaven and hell;
Elixir, poison; life, death's knell;
Desire, its lack; and other opposites,
Are of Prakriti varioùs composites.

God has created everything, for us to choose what we most want
Good men take the milk of goodness, bad in evil waters flaunt. 6

When such discernment God bestows,
Shunning vice, heart in virtue glows.
Impelled by Nature, Time and Fates,
Good men too sometimes make mistakes.

But Faith leads them to path of Right,
Their virtuous deeds bringing fame bright!

The wicked feign good deeds well cloaked,
But can't hide vice in which they're soaked.
They try to garb themselves as good,
And deceive people by their hood.

But suffer when deception bared,
Like Ravana, Kalnemi, Rahu fared.
Virtue is blessed e'en in poor garb,
All hold Hanuman in deep regard.

'Tis company which makes good or bad:
Good into good, bad into bad.

With air, t'ward heavens dust does rush,
But mixed with water forms a slush.
A saint speaks in the name of God,
A drunkard's empty words are odd.

'Tis soot in smoke that makes us blink,
The self same soot is Scripture's ink.
Soot too, with water, fire and air
Forms rain which life to earth does bear.

Water and wind, shelter and dress, are good and bad in different modes,
Those who can calmly thus reflect, get peace on life's arduous roads. 7a
Alike are both halves of the month, same are its dark and moonlight nights,
Waxing moon one half honour brings, its waning other's repute slights. 7b
Of Divine Pleasure on this earth, is created life both big and small,
With humble love and folded hands, Tulsi invokes blessings of all. 7c

O ye gods and deities! mortal ones and birds; ghosts and departed ancestors! Gandharvas, kinnars and demons of the night! bestow upon me your mercy!

The eighty-four lakhs species of life, created by the four modes of birth; which inhabit air, water and earth, are pervaded with the spirit of Rama and the Divine Mother Sita. Knowing this I humbly bow to them all.

Though I lack ability, I aspire to sing of the Glory of Rama. My verses lack quality but are adorned with the Name of Rama. Knowing them to be steeped in His devotion, those who love the Name of the Lord will find in the verses unfathomable joy. 8

Vile men will deride my composition, but I shall profit by their mockery. Those who neither like poetry nor have devotion in Rama's Feet will treat my verses like limericks. It is not unfair of them to laugh at my composition. Firstly, my verses are in Hindi; secondly, I am unskilled. Therefore they are fit for mockery. Those who have no love for Rama will find them insipid, but those who are devoted in the Lord's Feet shall find them sweet.

They bear devotion of Lord's Feet,
Knowing this good men shall hear and greet.
I am no poet nor know words' grace,
Of art and learning have no trace.

•

Words, meters, meanings, grace profuse,
Expressions, rhythm adorn Muse,
Not one of these arts do I bear,
This truth on paper blank declare.

Though my verses lack qualities all, they have one virtue famed,
Knowing this good men who are learned, my verses will acclaim. 9

With bounteous Name of Rama engraved,
Purest of pure, Essence of Veda.
Abode of welfare, woes defeat,
Which Shiva with Uma e'er repeat.

E'en verses sung by poets famed,
Lack glory sans Rama's Holy Name.
Like maiden fair of moonlike face,
Her limbs uncovered has no grace.

Verses sans art of poet unskilled,
But Holy Name of Rama instilled,
Good men hear them and thrilled repeat,
Like bees, they only virtue seek.

My verses lacking qualities all,
The dazzling power of Rama recall;
This is the only hope I stake:
Who finds not greatness 'midst the great?

E'en smoke its acrid smell forsakes,
When perfume from incense it takes.
My verses lack all art indeed,
But sing of Rama's Pure Hallowed Deeds.

Tulsi, the story of Rama's Deeds brings Bliss, from Kaliyuga's sins unbinds,
Distorted are words of my verse, like course of Ganga's stream doth wind,
But will get beauty with Rama's Fame and please the hearts of all mankind,
Shiva sports ash from cremation ghats, yet sacred turn recalled in mind.

Associated with the Glory of Rama, my story will please all human beings, like plain wood on Mount Malaya is held in reverence as sandalwood. Even the rustic words in which I will narrate the Glory of Sita and Rama will enthrall their listeners. 10

Even Saraswati, the goddess of Speech finds relaxation in Glory of Deeds of Rama. Therefore wise poets sing of His Glory.

Wise men liken the heart to an ocean, wisdom to sea shells, and goddess Saraswati to the Swati Nakshatra.[1] When rain of Discerning Thought mingle with waters of the ocean, pearls of Poetry are formed in the sea shells. Wise men make a garland of these pearls, using the Thread of Rama's Deeds, and experience the thrill of Divine Rapture. 11

Saraswati, Shiva, Brahma, Shastras, Vedas, Puranas describe the Lord as: 'Not this! Not this!'. Yet knowing the Divine Glory of Rama to be beyond description, all seek to sing the songs of His Eternal Beatitude. This, the Vedas say, is to invoke the power of prayer and devotion. 12

The Absolute, Desireless, Formless and Nameless, Unborn, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, All Pervading Lord, was Incarnated in the form of Rama for redemption of mankind.

The Abode of Mercy and All Pervading Rama is of gentle Nature. Knowing that He is the Redeemer and Liberator, the wise sing of His Glory to purify their speech and to gather the fruits of His Devotion.

Such hope to me doth courage bring,
To bow to Rama His Deeds to sing.
Munis have sung these Deeds in past,
Tulsi humbly follows their path.

When kings have mighty rivers bridged, to carry them across,
Even an ant can cross the stream, without its labour lost. 13

This strength to my heart I shall bring,
And of the Deeds of Rama I'll sing.
Vyasa and other munis of yore,
Who have composed Rama's Deeds before;

[1]Swati Nakshatra is the fifteenth asterism. It is said that rain which falls in Swati Nakshatra has necterial qualities.

I humbly bow to their kind feet,
Fulfilment of my heart I seek.
Kaliyuga's great poets too I greet,
Who have sung of Rama's hallowed Deeds.

O poets! grant me your blessings so that my story may be honoured amongst saints and sages. Rama's Fame bears glory but my composition is unattractive. Therefore I am besieged with doubts and I am consumed with anxiety. But O poets! your kindness can help me. Even a coarse cloth embroidered with silken threads attains beauty.

Good men respect simple verses which sing of Glory's Fame,
Which make old foes forget their strife and each other acclaim, 14a
Such verses flow from wisdom deep, my wisdom's Store is small,
To sing Rama's Deeds your mercy grant, repeatedly I call. 14b
O poets and saints! you are the swans sporting on Rama's Deeds Lake,
A child's prayer heed and give him strength! Mercy upon his take. 14c
I bow to Valmiki's feet, who verses of Ramayana composed,
Which are glorious and sweet, of words contained not one impure.
14d So

The four Vedas I beseech, like ship to cross ocean of life,
Glory of Rama to preach, who tire not e'er even in dreams. 14e So

I greet the fair city of Ayodhya and river Saryu which redeems all sins of Kaliyuga.
I greet the people of Ayodhya for whom the Lord has abiding love. 15
I beseech Avadh's king, who had pure love in gracious Rama,
Like straw his life did fling, separated from Merciful Lord. 16 So

Janaka, his kins I greet,
His deep love in Rama's Feet.
In yoga and bhoga concealed,
Seeing Rama which was revealed.

I hail first Bharat's Feet,
Of penance none can speak.
Engrossed in Feet of Rama,
Like black bees lotus swarm.

I bow to Lakshmana's Feet,
To Rama's devotees giving peace;
Who for Rama's Flag of Fame,
The staff to hold became.

O Shesha who hold the Earth!
To fear dispel took birth!

Propitious thou become!
I hail Sumitra's son!

I bow to Satrughana's Feet,
Brave! following Bharat's lead!
Great Hanuman I invoke,
Of whom Rama Himself spoke.

Brave Hanuman I invoke, Wisdom's Image and Fire for foes,
In server's heart's abode, Rama dwells for e'er bow arrows held. 17 So

The sages Vyasa and Valmiki have sung of the Lord with this in mind. Bowing to the Holy Feet of Rama. Tulsi humbly follows.

2. INVOCATION OF THE DIVINE NAME OF RAMA

I beseech both Lotus Feet of the daughter of King Janaka, the Universal Mother, Beloved Consort of the Ocean of Mercy, Sri Rama Chandra. May Her Divine Blessings grant me unclouded wisdom.

In mind and action and in speech, I pray to the Almighty Lotus Feet of Sri Rama; the Lotus-Eyed Lord, resplendent in glory with bow and arrow; Redeemer of woes and Bestower of Rapturous Joy in hearts of His devotees.

Inseparable as word from its purport; as wave from water on which it rides; differing only in form, but essentially one and the same, I bow in reverent prayer to Sri Sita Rama who have deepest affection for the distressed and forlorn. 18

O Gracious Rama! I hail Thy Glorious Name!
The substance of the sun and moon and flame!
Trinity of gods! The Vedas soul and its call!
O Peerless Name! Fathomless! Bearing all!

The Hymn of hymns which Shiva Himself did sing.
In hallowed Kashi salvation to bring.
The might it wields Ganesha did well know.
Who leads the gods by virtue of Its glow.

The bard immortal knew Its Benign Grace.
Though jumbled was the name his lips had traced.
Thy Name the Hymn of thousand names outweighs.
Thus told by Shiva, His Consort to Thee prays.

By Parvati's faith Shiva was with joy suffused.
In his own form, his darling's form he fused!
Shiva knows Its power; the magic of the Name,
When sweet as nectar poison's cup became!

Devotees are like paddy shoots,
Their faith is rain for slender roots.
Name's syllables two sweet rapture bring
Like autumn cool and glorious spring! 19

Both syllables of Thy Name are melody sweet
Like eyes of alphabet saint's heart to greet.
Simple the Name—resplendent gifts It plies,
Fortune on earth, salvation when one dies.

Blissful in thought, glorious to speak and hear.
Like Rama and Lakshmana to Tulsi is dear.
O Name Divine! Thy syllables bliss impart,
Like Brahma and Jiva, each of the other part.

Both man and god dwell in Thy Name as twins,
It shelters saints and saves the world from sins.
Like dazzling earrings Dame faith to adorn,
Benign as moonlit night, the sunlit morn!

Its Bliss has peace of Moksha and nectar's taste,
Bearing earth's burdens like Tortoise and Shesha.
For lotus hearts of saints like hovering bees,
Like Balarama Krishna, Yashodha's heart to please.

One syllable like crown's brilliant light,
The other canopy dazzling bright.
Amongst all letters these are best,
Tulsi hails them which lead the rest. 20

Of matching virtue seem the name and named,
But by the Bliss of Name is Rama attained,
Two modes has Divine Glory: Name and Form,
Lead kindly Faith through Name to the Unborn!

Greater 'twixt Name and Form 'tis vain to state,
The wise will choose for themselves by their traits.
Forsooth the form upon its name depends,
Can form without its name one comprehend?

Its name unknown, a form though dazzling bright,
Fades from the mind unknown, though known by sight.
O Hymn of Form Unseen! O Name Benign!
Thy song brings to the heart Thy Form Divine!

Of Name and Form, limitless are the traits,
Their rapture sweet beyond words to narrate.

O Name Divine! Bridge ''wixt Formless and Form!
Conveyor of Message of Unborn when Born!

On door of lips place Benign Name,
The jewelled lamp of Divine Flame!
Hearken to Tulsi if you like
Light both within and in your life. 21

Grace of the Name e'en those enlightened seek,
Repeating It they wake while others sleep.
Thus one attains Brahma's highest serene Bliss,
The Formless, Nameless, Absolute is his!

Those who by knowledge Divine rapture seek.
For fulfilment the Name on lips they keep.
Some comforts of cosmic world strive to gain,
The siddhis eight they earn by Thy great Name.

Some take the Name burdened with worldly grief,
Blest with sweet peace from woes they get relief.
Seekers of peace, all four in different ways.
All sinless, saintly, full of virtue's rays.

'Mongst those invoking Mercy of Thy Name,
The wise, discerning, Thy Benign Love claim.
Though in four yugas o'er Vedas the Name holds sway,
In Kaliyuga Name! Thou art the only way!

Absorbed in Rama's devotion deep,
Those who from passions distant keep.
In Name's sweet ocean of sheer bliss,
Sport happily like care-free fish. 22

Of Brahma, Form and Formless are different modes,
Both Endless, Fathomless, of Bliss Abode.
But greater than both these, O Name art Thou!
To Thy sweet Bliss, Thy gentle Grace they bow!

O goodly men! these are not poet's mere words,
This is conviction! Love in deep faith stirred!
Like fire, the Form and Formless e'er remain,
Kindled in wood, or potent in its grain.

One seen aglow, power of the other barred,
Both Truth forsooth, but each to fathom hard,
O Name! O Power! which makes all doubts so clear,
Greater than Brahma! O Name! more than Rama dear!

Bramha is pervading! Indestructible! One!
Consciousness-Bliss, All power on earth and sun.
Benign the Lord in whom all mortals dwell,
Still grief and sorrow casts its gloomy spell.

O Name's sweet charm! the magic from Thee flown
Revealeth Brahma! Like gem when real is known.

Thus does Thou mighty potent Name
Transcend the Formless—Supreme's fame.
Tulsi's heart knows Name hath such charm
As transcends Form—the Divine Rama! 23

Rama took a human form saints peace to give,
In suffering dwelt, so that virtue may live.
But His devotees, invoking His Name,
Without effort, eternal peace attain.

Merciful Rama redeemed sage Gautam's wife,
O Name! Thou saves millions from path of vice.
In Vishwamitra's ashram peace to restore,
Rama slew Taraka, her son's army galore.

His Name behold! devotee's grief dispels,
Like dazzling sun the nights darkness repels.
Rama only broke Shiva's mighty ancient bow,
O Name! Thy might lays humans' sorrows low.

Rama made the Dandaka forest hallowed ground,
In Thee, O Name! all minds have rapture found.
By Rama's arrows, thousands of demons fell,
Thou can O Name! all sins of Kaliyuga quell.

Rama His Divine Abode did show,
To Jatayu, Shabri, others few.
On Name! of Vedas the precious theme,
Salvation from Thee millions glean. 24

To only two Rama Mercy's Shelter gave,
Vibhishana wise and Sugriva warrior brave.
Thou shelters all who call, O Benign Name!
Such is in Veda and world Thy hallowed fame!

With bears and vanars gathered on the shore,
The bridge was built which Rama o'er waters bore.
O Hallowed Name! Thou whispered on the lip,
Ocean of distress dries ! One needs no ship!

Rama slew Ravana on Lanka's battle ground,
Sita reclaimed, he then sped homeward bound.
'Midst regal glory kingdom's crown he wore,
Gods, sages in sweet music greeting bore.

But Name! Devotee Thine quick victory bears,
'Gainst assault of desires triumphant fares.
Peaceful in mind, his heart in rapture filled,
Even in dreams all cares by Name are stilled.

Greater is Name—Salvations dawn!
Than Brahma or Rama, Formless or Form:
All Knowing Shiva chose Thee Name of Charm!
From hundred crore verses of Rama! 25

By power of Name Lord Shiva immortal is,
Clad in weird garments, yet emblem of Bliss!
O Name! Suka, Sanakadi and enlightened souls,
Earned Bliss of Brahma with Thee as their life's goal.

Narada knew might of Thee, O glorious Name!
As God is dear to all, so grew his fame.
O Potent Name! Prahlad Thy strength did seek,
Threatened with death, Thy Name alone did speak.

Dhruva took the Name distressed at mothers wrath,
And by Its Grace, attained the starry path.
Hanuman repeating Thee, Pure reverent Name!
Enchanted Rama, His dearest one became.

Ajamil, Pingla Harlot, in sin wrought,
Attained salvation when the Name they sought.
O Potent Name! What words can Thy power state?
Not Rama Himself can Thy Sweet Bliss relate!

O Glorious Name! Thou art in Kaliyuga the Tree of Benign Dispensation, bearing fruit of fulfilment of desires unto those who seek Thy Divine Shelter! By the grace of Thy unfathomable Mercy, Tulsidas has been purified, even as a wild shrub transformed into a bower of the sacred fragrant Tulsi! 26

Not in Kaliyuga alone, yea! in all four yugas, in Time eternal: the past, present and future, jiva hath been redeemed from sorrow by meditation on the Holy Name. Vedas, Puranas and sages have decreed that attainment of virtue is the fruit of devotion in the hallowed Name.

In Satyayuga, the ecstasy of Divine Enlightenment may be attained by

knowledge. In Tretayuga, performance of sacrifices and observance of austerities may lead to Godliness. In Dwapar yuga, worship and obeisance to gods may reveal the aura of Divine Bliss. But in Kaliyuga sin and evil is deep rooted, confusing humanity with abysmal darkness, even as fish bound in waters of the oceans.

In such an age of unrelenting ignorance in which human consciousness is confined by the mantle of vice, meditation on the hallowed Name alone can liberate one from the drawing net of evil. Verily, in Kaliyuga, only the Hallowed Name of Rama is the sustainer and protector of life on earth and is the path of salvation in the hereafter.

In an age of dwindling faith in virtuous deeds, divine devotion and knowledge, the Holy Name is the only hope for humanity.

Yea! The Name is God! The Name is Prahlad in the kingdom of Hiranyakashipu! The Name is the vanquisher of the demons of vice! 27

In love or in hate, in repose or in anger, in happiness or in sorrow, the Hallowed Song of the Name infuses Bliss in all directions.

I bow in reverence to the Glorious, All Mighty Name and seek Its Divine Grace in relating the wondrous deeds of Rama.

Rama will correct all my mistakes,
His Mercy ne'er mercy forsakes.

Lord great like Rama, poor server I,
Yet from me He has turned not eye.
Of Lord such is the fame Vedas say,
Hearing one pray, turns not away.

The rich or poor, learned, unwise,
Rustic, elite, famed or despised;
Good poet or unskilled, as they sing,
All people hail and praise their king.

While virtuous , those gentle, wise
Who from gods noble clan arise,
Knowing their intent, their plaint when heard,
They grant favours in gentle words.

By true love Rama is won indeed,
Alas! Tulsi the foolish leads.

But Rama who turned rocks into ship, vanars ministers made,
Shall surely heed my yearnings deep and love in my heart laid. 28a

Server of Rama I call myself, and so all others say,
This Rama endures! can Tulsi claim to such Benign Lord lay ? 28b

Such nerve and folly I display,
As Hell too would send me away.
Knowing this of myself I'm afraid,
Yet Rama does not my fault upbraid.

My Lord had heard and seen my ways,
And yet my love and wisdom praised.
This is because Rama intent sees,
Mere love in heart the Lord will please.

Devotees' faults Lord sets aside,
Their virtues in His heart reside.
The fault for which Bali was slain,
Was found in Sugriva's ways again;

Vibhishana's deeds were too the same,
But Rama did not devotees blame.
He praised them when Bharat he met,
And in his court again he said.

Vanars on trees alike himself, the Lord had given place,
Tulsi is there another Lord so kind and of such grace ? 29a

O Rama! Thy Bounty brings to all full measure of welfare,
If this is true, Tulsi forsooth, shall never face despair. 29b

3. INVOCATION OF RAMACHARITMANASA

The story of the glorious deeds of Rama was first narrated by Lord Shiva to his beloved Consort Parvati. Knowing Kakbhusundi to be a deserving devotee of the Lord, Shiva later related the wondrous story to him. Yajnavalkya heard it from Kakbhusundi, and later related it to sage Bharadwaj. These illustrious sages had deep knowledge of the sportive deeds of Incarnated Rama and sung the story of His earthly deeds in rapturous joy.

So it was that I, Tulsi, heard the wondrous deeds from my guru at Soraon. Alas, I was then a child and could not fathom the exhilirating depth of the Divine words. My guru repeated the glorious story again and again and as Time passed I, his humble devotee, Inspired by Rama will relate the story to bring peace to my heart. 30

The story of Rama is an inspiration for mankind. It destroys lust, anger and passions. O readers! be not fraught with disbelief on hearing the wonders of the glorious deeds of Rama. This is the story of the Lord Incarnate Himself. Wondrous indeed is the Glory of the Lake of the Deeds of Rama: 33

Heart valley deep; virtue good ground,
Vedas Puranas; sea; saints sages; cloud;
Sending cool sparkling showers of rain,
Which glory of Rama's Bliss contain.

Rama's mortal deeds of which I sing,
To such rain cleaning power doth bring.
Devotion, beyond words domain,
Makes cool and sweet this gentle rain.

It sustains virtue's fields of rice,
For Rama's devotees it is life.
This self same rain on virtue's ground,
Flowing through the ears as channel bound.

Fills up the valley of the heart,
To peace and placid grace impart.

Four dialogues fair, of wisdom deep, adorn the story I relate,
Like peaceful ghats along four sides, of this wondrous and holy lake. 36

Its chapters seven, flights of steps,
Beholding them one rapture gets.
Rama's Nirguna glory between lines
Is depth unknown which lake confines.

On lake of nectar of Rama's Grace,
Like pretty waves, similes race,
Chaupais are lovely lotus beds,
Muse's art shell a pearl that sheds.

Its dohas, chhands and sorthas fair,
Are lotus blooms of colours rare.
Their peerless thoughts, meanings and words,
Pollen on filament of bud stirred.

Its lively actions like bees swarm,
Learned, discerning, like the swan.
The poem's art, rhythm and rhymes
Graceful like fish of divers kinds.

Four fruits of lives wise thoughts and prayers
Of life detached from worldly cares.
Nine poetic styles, all in this song,
Like living creatures in lake throng.

Sages sing glorious hymns to Rama,
Like sporting birds on waters calm.

Like mango trees, saints fringe the lake,
Like buoyant spring their love and faith.

Spring's bloom: restraints and precepts five,
Fruit: from it Rama's love to derive.
Replete with other stories bright,
Like cuckoos, parrots in delight.

Its rapture like a garden is, birds singing in cool breeze.
Its gardener is devoted heart, spraying tears of love on trees. 37

Those who sing these lays are keepers of this beautiful lake; those who listen to its verses in reverent joy, inherit the rapture of its eternal peace.

For those who are lost in passions, seeking only their fulfilment, this lake of virtue has nothing to offer. But those who seek the Mercy of Rama and His Divine Favour, are charmed by its cool and fragrant waters. 38

My song now commences.

It will flow like the Saryu river, dazzling with the Glory of Rama. In my verses the Bliss of Rama will unite with Devoted Love, even as the confluence of the Saryu and Ganga. This song of glory will also contain the heroic story of the Divine Ones as warriors in the cause of Truth, like the merging of the mighty river Son in this confluence of Saryu and Ganga.

Like this eternal river, the flowing music of my song of Rama's Beatitude is beautiful in all seasons. The marriage of Shiva and Parvati is its winter; Sri Rama's birth, its exhilarating early spring; the story of the Divine Marriage of Rama is its delightful and auspicious spring—the king of all seasons; Sri Rama's banishment to the woods is its hot summer and his journey to the woods the blazing sun and scorching winds; the encounter with demons the thunderous torrents of monsoon rains, refreshing to gods like rice fields filled with water. The peaceful reign of Rama, his gentleness and majesty is it enchanting lovely autumn.

Thus I have described, to the best of my ability, the glory of the Song I am to sing. Bathing my mind in these hallowed waters, I proceed to narrate the wondrous story.

Meditating upon Shankara and Parvati, with the Lotus Feet of Rama enshrined in heart, Tulsi now sings the Song of songs, the eternal delight of sages and devotees.

II. THE PROLOGUE

1. THE STORY OF SHIVA AND SATI

Once after the Makar bathing festival at Prayag, Bharadwaj asked the venerable sage Yajnavalkya to stay with him for a while. Washing the feet

of the noble sage in deep reverence, Bharadwaj addressed him, "O learned sage! I am besieged with longing to know who is Rama, of whose glory the Puranas and Upanishads sing. The name of Rama is preached also by Lord Shiva. There is a Rama, son of King Dasharatha. His deeds of valour and of championing the cause of dharma are known throughout the world. He suffered tribulations of banishment and later separation from his wife in the woods. He killed Ravana, the mighty demon king in the terrible war of Lanka. Is this Rama the same as the one worshipped by Shiva ? You are learned in the essence of Vedas! Pray enlighten me, O revered sage!"

The great sage Yajnavalkya smiled as he heard the words of sage Bharadwaj, "The glory of Raghunath is known to you," he said, " and you are His devotee in mind, in action and in speech. I know your strategy whereby you seek the rapture of listening to the glorious deeds of the Lord!"

"Hearken then O son!" said the sage, "to the beautiful story of Rama with concentrated attention. Similar doubts arose in the heart of Sati, and Lord Shiva enlightened her, recounting the Glory of Rama. First, I will narrate the story of Shiva and Sati which will dispel the doubts in your mind."

Once upon a time in Tretayuga, Shiva accompanied by Sati, his consort, went to visit the great sage Agastya. Lord Shiva remained with the sage for many days, hearing from him the noble deeds of Rama. When he left his heart was full of desire of beholding the Incarnation of God in the form of Rama.

During that period, the Lord had Incarnated Himself in Raghu's clan in the dazzling Form of Rama, to redeem the woes of humanity. At his father's behest he fared in the forests, seeking his wife Sita who had been carried away by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka.

Without revealing the longings of his heart to Sati, Lord Shiva looked about restlessly in the forests, hoping to behold the form of Rama. His wish was soon fulfilled and he beheld the lustrous sky-blue form of the Lord. Without disclosing himself, he gazed at Rama to his hearts content. Silently Shiva greeted the Lord: "Hail to Thee Redeemer of the worlds! Hail to Thee Truth—Consciousness—Bliss!" 48, 49

Sati's curiosity was aroused as she saw the ecstasy that filled her husband on seeing Rama. To her, Rama appeared a common human being. She was exceedingly puzzled as to why Lord Shiva himself, god of the Universe, to whom all other gods, sages and humans paid obeisance should have bowed to Rama, a mere prince, and should have hailed him as 'Truth-Consciousness-Bliss'.

'How could', wondered Sati, 'Brahma, the Ommipresent, Unborn, beyond Maya and qualities, the Formless whom even the Vedas knew not,

take human form? And if indeed the Lord had taken Form, He would be the All-knowing One like Shiva. Would he then be seeking His wife thus in the woods? Yet, again, the words of Shiva cannot be false!' 50

While Sati pondered, Shiva knew the doubt in her heart and tried to dispel it by explaining to her that Rama was the Incarnation of God:

Of Whom sages, hermits and saints, for ever think with peaceful mind.
Of Whose Glory sing scriptures Vedas, but words to define cannot find.
That All-prevading Maya's Lord, Who over all the worlds holds sway,
Of His Free Will in Raghu's clan, for His devotees comes today.

But though Sati heard him in silence, he knew that she continued to harbour doubts within her heart. Smiling, Shiva spoke to her: "If you still have doubts, why do you not remove them by putting him to test? I will sit here under this tree and wait for you. Go dispel your doubts in a suitable manner." 51

As Shiva sat under the tree, he thought, 'There is misfortune in store for Sati. She doubts the Lord Himself, and my words did not allay her apprehensions. Unrelenting indeed is the hand of Destiny and Divine Will shall prevail. Shiva then began repeating the Name of Rama while he waited for her.

Meanwhile Sati returned slowly to the place where they had met Rama. She pondered as to how she should ascertain the truth of Shiva's words. Ultimately she decided to assume the form of Sita whom Rama was seeking in the forests. She thought that he would be misled into thinking that he had found his lost wife. 52

Rama, the All knowing Lord, saw Sati, and immediately recognised her. With a graceful smile he folded his hands in greeting. Introducing himself to her, he made anxious enquiries about Shiva and asked her how she happened to fare alone in the woods.

Sati was completely confused on hearing the gentle words of the Lord, and she hastily retraced her steps. The All Knowing Rama perceived the doubts that had assailed her and resolved to acquaint her with the immanence of His Divine Glory. As Sati hastened back to Shiva, she saw before her the dazzling form of a smiling Rama, accompanied by his ever faithful and devoted brother and his consort Sita, whom she thought he was searching in the Dandaka woods, in human form. 53

In her perplexity, Sati turned the other way and lo! the same dazzling forms of Rama, Sita and Lakshman stood before her. In mounting desparation Sati turned hither and thither, but wherever she looked she saw before her the Omnipresent Rama with His Divine Consort Sita and Inseparable brother Lakshman!

Sati stood amazed. She saw before her the magnificent glorious Maya

of Divine Rama. She saw innumerable sages bowing in obeisance to the wondrous dazzling form of Rama. Aye! she even saw Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha himself with hosts of gods, singing to the Glory of Rama! 54

Sati trembled within her heart witnessing the profound expansiveness of the Divine Glory of Rama that she had doubted. Closing her eyes, she bowed to the ground overawed by the majesty of the Divine Revelation.

Sometime later when Sati opened her eyes she found herself alone in the woods. In the confused state of her mind, she hastened back to Shiva and exclaimed: "Husband mine! My doubts are removed and I am now convinced that Lord Rama is the Incarnation of God." 55

Knowing that Sati had taken the Holy form of Sita, Shiva was deeply grieved because he loved his wife dearly. He bowed to the Lotus Feet of Rama within his heart. 'I cannot meet Sati as my wife in the body in which she once assumed the form of Sita, the Divine Mother', he firmly decided, Meditating upon Rama he left for his own abode on Mount Kailash. A voice from the Heavens proclaimed; "Hail to Thee! O Mahesha! Thou hast made Devotion firm and upheld its glory! Who other than Thee could have taken such a vow in the name of devotion! Thou art the true devotee of Rama! Great is Thy power! Thou art indeed divine!" 56

Such is the beautiful course of love. Even as milk and water contained in milk are separately indiscernible, so does true love unite husband and wife; but a single act of guile separates those joined in love, like a drop of sour lime separates milk from water with which it was united. 57

Shiva solaced his distressed wife with legends of the past. On reaching Mount Kailash he went into meditation on the Holy Name of the Lord. Sati dwelt in Kailash, sorrowing grievously. Each day that she passed was like an age. 'The Creator has done as I deserved', thought she . 'But O God! I cannot live without Shankara. In the anguish of my heart, I pray to Rama, who is hailed as the Lord of Compassion, and of whom the Vedas sing as Remover of Distress!' 58

When Shiva awoke from his trance of Divine ecstasy, Sati bowed before his feet. He gave a seat in front of him and recited to her hymns to the Divine Lord. Thus they lived for some time, Sati seated in front of the great Shiva instead of at his side, listening to the praises of the Lord sung by him. 59

After some time there was a yajna performed at the abode of Daksha, father of Sati. She desired to attend the ceremony and sought permission of Shiva, who had, however, not been invited to attend. 'To go unasked is not right', said Shiva, but when his words failed to dissuade her, he arranged for his broken hearted wife to go to her father's home. 60;61;62

Death came to her to relief her the agony of lost love. It came in a tragic

way. In her father's home she found that due honour had not been paid to her beloved husband in the yajna which was being performed there. By way of protest, she leapt into the rising flames of the yajna fire: "Hearken all ye assembled sages!" she proclaimed, "ye who have insulted or seen the insult done to Shiva shall suffer and my father shall rue his folly. Either one should smite the tongue of one who insults saints, Shiva or Vishnu, or else close his ears and leave the assembly. Shiva is the spirit and father of the world. In ignorance my father has insulted him. I hasten to abandon my body, begotten of his seed!" 63

Thus ended the mortal life of Sati, beloved of Shiva.

2. THE STORY OF SHIVA AND PARVATI[1]

So deep was the devotion of Sati for her beloved Lord, that when she leaped into the rising flames of the yajna at her father's home, she prayed to Hari that she may be united with Shiva for ever in her subsequent birth. In time to come she was born as the daughter of Himwant, the King of Mountains and Maina, his beautiful queen. Nature bloomed forth in all its glory as the lovely child was born. She was named Parvati, after the mountains in which she took birth.

Parvati's birth was an augury of prosperity in the kingdom of Himwant. Mines of jewels were discovered and each day saw some new delight in the royal palace. Brahma and the gods sung of the praises of the kingdom and wise sages came to take abode in the mountains getting respectful welcome from the king.

When Narada heard of the news of the great development of the kingdom of Himwant, he fared thither to visit the noble king. Himwant and Maina paid obeisance to their distinguished visitor. Seating him on his royal throne the king asked Narada: "O sage! thou knowest the past, present and future; thou art the all knowing having traversed the universe. I pray thee, relate the qualities of my daughter." 66

Narada, the sage, these words then spoke:

"Of qualities is your child abode!
Gentle, for wisdom, beauty famed,
Uma, Ambika, Bhawani named!

Of all attainments full her life,
Of her husband, beloved wife!
Of her nuptials the world shall sing,
To parents she shall glory bring!

[1]The story of Shiva and Parvati has been abridged. The detailed version of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati is contained in 'Parvati Mangala', appearing in volume VI of this work.

She shall be worshipped far and wide,
Welfare shall by her grace abide.
Women who take her holy name,
Shall bliss of married life attain."

"Such are the dazzling qualities of your beautiful daughter, O king", said Narada. "With these, she shall surely be blessed. But hearken now to a strange sign that she bears. She shall be wedded to an ascetic, a mendicant recluse with matted hair, having no father or mother, of awesome form." 67

Hearing the words of Narada, Himwant and Maina grew exceedingly sad but Parvati rejoiced within herself. Seeing the grieving king and queen the sage spoke again: "Such surely shall be the husband of your daughter; yet, if he be Shiva, these very qualities which he possesses shall be his virtues. The Lord Shiva is All Powerful, but it is hard to propitiate him. Let your daughter practice penance for Tripurari and he will answer her prayers; for he is full of compassion." 68, 70

Narada returned to Brahma's court. Sorrow was writ on the brows of the king and queen. But Parvati glowed with pure devotion within her heart. She resolved to win Shiva with the severest austerities and penances. A gloom pervaded the royal palace. The sage Vedashira then came and solaced the king and queen as Parvati set forth for the mountain caves. 72, 73

There she meditated upon the wondrous yet terrible form of Shiva. She fasted and prayed and rarely was such a penance witnessed before. Ultimately, when Parvati renounced any sustenance whatsoever. Brahma's deep voice resounded from the heavens:

"Hearken O maiden of the Mounts! of your desire you earn the boon!
Renounce your severe penance now. Shiva whom you seek will be yours soon. 74

Learned sages many have been,
But ne'er has such penance been seen.
Brahma's voice in heart take to be sure,
For ever true and ever pure."

Parvati was thrilled to hear the voice from the heavens. Stronger grew her devotion and firmer her resolve to win the gracious heart of Shiva.

Meanwhile Shiva, filled with devotion to Rama, graced the earth, by singing to the Glory of the Lord. Sometimes discoursing on knowledge midst sages and sometimes singing the rhapsody of the glory of Rama, Shiva strengthened devotion but suffered in loneliness of separation from his own loving consort, Sati. Pleased with his unswerving devotion, Lord

Rama appeared before him and hailing the mighty Shiva, requested him to wed Parvati. 75, 76

"Lord!" said Shiva, "It is my dharma to obey Thy commands." 76

Shiva thereupon sent the seven rishis to put Parvati's devotion to test. When the rishis saw Parvati she seemed to them to be Penance personified. "O gentle maiden!" they softly said, "for whom are you undergoing such severe penances? On whom are you meditating, and what is your desire?" 77

Parvati blushed shyly as she whispered in her sweet voice: "My heart hesitates to disclose its desire, O wise sires! for you will only laugh at my ambitions. Taking what Narada said to be true, I seek to fly without wings. O wise munis!" she sighed in despair of her overwrought emotions, "Mark my ignorance! I aspire to be wedded to Shiva for ever and for ever!" 78

To test the firmness of her resolve, the rishis derided Parvati's resolve: "Thou art indeed born of the mountains, O comely maiden! Whoever has profited by Narada's advice ? He advised the sons of Daksha and they lived not to see their home again. He destroyed Chitraketu's family and such too was the fate of Hiranyakashipu. Do not place trust in Narada's words. We have in mind a suitable husband for you. We will arrange you marriage with Vishnu." 79

Parvati smiled as she heard their words. "O wise rishis, you have spoken truly," she said, "I am indeed born of the mountains! Firm as rock is my resolve. Even though my body may wither I cannot for a moment waver. One who heeds not guru's words cannot attain peace or salvation." "O revered sire!" she softly said, "I seek the one to whom I have pledged my heart. I beseech you, O sages, leave me to my fate. Either I will serve the lotus feet of my Shiva or else I shall remain for ever a virgin." 80

The rishis were convinced of the firmness of Parvati's resolve and sang to the glory of the beautiful goddess: "Hail to Thee, O Mother of the world! O Bhawani! Hail to Thee!" "Thou art Maya and Shiva is Thy God. Both Shiva and Thou are the father and mother of the universe!" The rishis then returned to Shiva who was exceedingly pleased to hear of Parvati's unswerving devotion. The rishis had advised Himwant to prevail upon Parvati to return to the royal palace and meanwhile Shiva resumed meditation on the Holy Name of Rama. 81

Now it so happened that Taraka, a demon of mighty strength, had vanquished the sovereign of several regions and had started persecuting the gods. They appealed to Brahma who assured them that the demon would be slayed by a son born of Shiva. He advised them to persuade Shiva to wed Parvati. Provided the god of love could succeed in rousing Shiva from his meditation, Brahma offered to make the request to Shiva on

Behalf of the gods. 82

The gods approached Kama, the god of love. Never had a more difficult assignment been given to him. "My end is certain," said the god of love, "nevertheless I shall assist you because, as the scriptures say, charity is the highest virtue." 83

The god of love then rose to go,
With Basant and his flowering bow.
As he went forth he knew in heart,
Opposing Shiva his life would part.

The god of love then cast his spell,
Drawn by his art the whole world fell.
The moment love its banner flew,
All precepts of the Vedas withdrew.

The celibate's vow, control and fasts,
Prayer, knowledge, dharma, science and arts,
Virtue, discernment, actions right,
Good forces all were put to flight.

Discernment with supporters fled, 'gainst Love's attack they sped away,
Nowhere could they be seen or heard, in books alone they hidden lay.
Confusion then spread all around, 'Who will now save us' people sighed,
Who has so dared to challenge Kama, who himself with bow arrow strides.
All male and female things on earth, both with or without life.
Departing from their nature's ways, were lost in passions strife. 84

Each mind did love in passion fix,
T'wards oceans rivers surged to mix.
Trees bent boughs creepers touch to get,
E'en ponds and lakes each other met.

When love in nature did prevail,
What of creation's bodies frail?
Birds beasts of water land and air,
Of time regardless sought lust's fare.

Captive of love all anguished lay,
The chakwa saw not night or day.

Casting his spell upon the world, the god of love approached Shiva, but as he saw him immersed in deep concentration, Kama despaired of his mission and the magic of his spell dwindled. He was ashamed to accept defeat and, resolving to sacrifice himself if need be, he ordered Basant to spread forth the charm of spring.

Flowers blossomed on trees. Woods and groves, pond and lakes, and all Nature was intoxicated with love. Lust stirred the hearts of even the old and weary. A cool fragrant breeze blew all around and fresh lotus blossomed in lakes. Bees hummed drowsily and parrots chattered gaily as nymphs sang and danced.

In a million ways, the god of love tried to draw Shiva away from his deep meditation, but all his artifices were of no avail and Shiva remained steadfastly absorbed in contemplation. The god of love raged at his failure and taking position on the branch of a mango tree, he aimed five fiery arrows from his flowery bow which struck Shiva in his heart. Shiva looked around in wrathful anger and saw the god of love amidst the boughs of the tree. The fire of his eyes destroyed the god of love and his body was turned into ashes. 85, 86

For a moment there was confusion in the world. The gods were dismayed and the demons were pleased; those addicted to sensual pleasures were sad with remembrances of love's delights. Saints and hermits felt relieved. Rati, wife of the god of love, wailed and lamented her dear lord's end. Shiva, the Compassionate solaced her telling her that henceforth her lord would be called *Ananga* (the bodiless) and he would pervade all things. 87

The mission of the gods had been fulfilled and Brahma, along with other gods, requested Shiva to marry Parvati.

Shiva gave his assent amidst showering of flowers and hailing of his glorious name.

Wondrous indeed was the marriage of Shiva and Parvati. Never had such a bridegroom been seen on earth:

> Attendants then Lord Shiva adorned,
> Hair coiled on head, crown of snakes formed.
> For earrings, bracelets, snakes he bore,
> Ashes on body, lion skin wore!
>
> On forehead moon, Ganga on head,
> Three eyes, snake for his holy thread.
> Necklace of skulls, poison in throat,
> Strangely attired, Mercy's Abode!
>
> Tabor and trident held in hands,
> He rode a bull as played the bands.

As priests performed the nuptials, the air resounded with greetings to Shankara. Flowers came in showers from the heavens and the gods hailed the bridegroom and his lovely bride: "Glory! Glory! Glory to Shankara! Glory to Parvati!"

Shiva returned with Parvati to his abode in Mount Kailash. Delighted in each other's company, the father and mother of the universe lived there in exultant joy. In time to come their son Kartikeya was born who later killed the demon Taraka, thus fulfilling the words of Brahma. 103

3. BIRTH OF THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF THE RAMAYANA[1]

Sage Bharadwaj was thrilled to hear the beautiful story of Shiva and Parvati. He was keen to hear the wondrous deeds of Lord Rama. Realising his eagerness, the revered sage Yajnavalkya said: "O worthy sage! You are blessed with deep devotion and, bowing to Lord Rama, I will narrate the story of Rama which is full of glorious deeds and is enriched with His teachings and acts of His merciful and gentle nature." 104

Lord Shiva was once sitting under the shade of a bargad tree in his abode on Mount Kailash. His beloved consort Parvati was seated beside him. Finding her husband in a peaceful and relaxed mind, she lovingly said: "O Saviour of the world! My dear Lord! If you are pleased with me, relate to me the Glory of Rama and dispel my ignorance. Reveal to me, my lord, the reason of the Incarnation, the childhood of Rama, the story of His Divine Marriage, the circumstances in which he had to leave his kingdom and what followed thereafter". 109, 110

For a few moments Shiva was absorbed in Divine meditation upon the Holy Name of Rama. He then bowed within himself with reverence to Rama and addressed his consort with deep love: "O Parvati! Maiden of the mountains! Blessed art thou! Blessed indeed art thou! For the sake of humanity you have requested me to relate the wondrous deeds of Rama."112

"Listen," spoke Shiva, "O, Parvati! to that Glorious story which was narrated by Kakbhusundi to Garuda, the King of Birds. How the conversation between Kakbhusundi and Garuda came to pass, I shall narrate later. Listen at present to the story of the Divine Incarnation of Rama. Listen with close and reverent attention": 120.

O Parvati! Song of Rama's great deeds,
Inscribed in Shastras and Vedas one reads.
Of Lord's Birth should one ask the cause—
Does Divine Will bear earthly laws?

Methinks Rama's Bliss one cannot reach,
By wisdom's logic, mind or speech.
Vedas, Puranas, sages, saints do give,
So.ne cause for which Lord came to live.

[1]Only an outline of the birth of the principal characters of *Ramacharitmanas* is given.

I'll tell you these—and what I feel,
O beauteous one, I will reveal.

When virtues, dharma on earth decrease;
Demons of pride and vice increase;
When justice ends with sins untold;
When terrors saints and virtue hold;

In various forms the Lord takes birth,
To end woes of good men on earth.

The Lord Unborn taking a form, destroys vice for virtue to live,
For Birth of Rama this was a cause, to dharma on earth new life to give. 121

Shiva then described some of the occasions on which the Lord thus manifested Himself. He narrated the amusing story of Narada's longing for a beauty created out of the Lord's Maya and how, when disillusioned, he rashly cursed the Lord saying that He would also pine for a woman in the forests.

Parvati was astounded on hearing that even Narada, who was a great devotee of the Lord, should have cursed Him. Shiva smiled and said: "None is ignorant, none is wise! All God's Will and Pleasure abide!"

Shiva smiled and said: "None is unwise, and neither is one wise, in every moment as Rama Wills, one becomes in a trice." 124a

Yajnavalka addressed Bharadwaj muni: "I now relate Rama's Deeds";
Says Tulsi, shedding passion pride, the story of Rama heed. 124b

On Mount Himwant there is a cave
Beside which ripple Ganga's waves.
Narada was filled with blissfilled awe,

Seeing beauty of woods, streams and hills,
With love for Rama's Feet he was filled.
Dwelling on Lord, curse Brahma had laid
Left Narada and to Lord he prayed.

Sage's penance made Indra afraid,
He called Kama and obeisance paid:
'To hinder Narada's penance go'.
Kama went to woods, his heart aglow.

This fear had heart of Indra besieged,
That Narada would his kingdom seize.
Those hearts in which lust and greed grows,
Bear dread from all like crafty crows.

Like dog with dry bone runs away, seeing king of beasts on course,
Afraid bone would be snatched from him, god's king felt no remorse. 125

When Kama saw that the cave was near,
His Maya caused Spring to appear.
Sweet blossoms covered diverse trees,
'Midst songs of koyals droned black bees.

Cool gentle fragrant turned the breeze,
Causing flames of lust to increase.
With maids celestial Rambha came,
Skilled in the art to love inflame.

They softly sung enchanting strains,
With ball in hand played charming games.
Narada stayed steadfast and unstirred,
Kama feared his end, knowing he had erred.

Who is sheltered by Gracious Rama,
Can one his honour dare to harm ?

Defeated and afraid in heart, with gentle humble speech,
Kama clasped the sages lotus feet, his pardon to beseech. 126

In Narada's heart no anger stirred,
He greeted Kama with gentle words.
Bowing to the sage's holy feet,
Kama asked his followers to retreat.

When Kama returned to Indra's court,
And of his failure gave report,
The gods in Heavens were amazed,
They bowed to Lord and muni praised.

Meanwhile Narada to Lord Shiva hied,
Of vanquishing Kama, heart full of pride.
He told Shiva how afeared Kama fled.
Being dear to him, Lord Shiva thus said:

'Pray heed my counsel, muni great,
The way in which you triumph relate,
Do not to Hari ever reveal,
E'en if one asks, wisely conceal'.

The counsel Shiva in earnest gave, for Narada was in vain,
Hear sporting deeds to come O sage! God's Will supreme doth reign! 127

All deeds are done as Rama ordains,
The course of Fates no man can change.

When Shiva's advice sage did not like,
To Bramha's Abode he quickly hied.

Singing the Glory of Lord's Deeds.
With Veena's tunes and cymbals' beats,
Narada to Milky Ocean came.
Where Vishnu, Veda's essence remains.

The Lord hailed Narada with delight,
Sat with the sage with him beside.
Lord smiled and said: 'I'm pleased to see,
Such honour you bestow on me'.

Kama's story then the sage retold,
Though Shiva had told him to withhold.
Rama's Maya's might the world contains,
Who born on earth untouched remains?

Then dryly spoke the Lord to sage these words in mocking strain,
'Dwelling on you attachment, pride and passions far remain. 128

Sage! passions can such hearts invade,
In which wisdom doth not pervade'.
But Lord reflected in His mind,
In sage's heart Pride's Tree roots find.

From his heart these I must soon weed,
To help devotees I must heed.

Narada to Lord then bowed to go,
Brimming with pride, his heart aglow.
The Lord His Maya's net then spread,
Hearken to deeds to which it led.

The Lord then made a lovely town, hundred yojans away,
More wondrous than Vishnu's Abode, where Beauty's arts held away. 129

So lovely were men women there,
As if Kama Rati themselves fare.
King Sheelanidhi lived in that town,
With glittering armies of renown.

Of hundred Indras he glory claimed,
Dazzling in form, his might was famed.
His daughter of Vishwamohini name,
Would put e'en Lakshmi's form to shame.

That maiden was of Maya made,
How can one her sweet charms relate.
The maiden would a fair prince wed,
Hundreds of princes there had met.

Narada came to that city fair,
Asking the people their welfare
To palace went hearing the news,
The king paid sage respect profuse.

The king asked princess to be brought from sage to blessings seek,
The future of our daughter read, sage of her qualities speak. 130

Seeing her, hermit muni was dazed,
For long at maiden deeply gazed.
Knowing her good qualities, himself lost,
Concealed in heart his yearnings tossed.

Who weds this maiden lovely, fair,
Shall in all wars victorious fare,
All living beings shall serve the man,
Who wins this charming maiden's hand.

Her qualities real he kept in heart,
Spelt virtues conjured by his art.
When from the king, muni returned,
His heart in passion's anguish burned.

I must contrive a way to find
To make this lovely maiden mine.
Prayer penance are of no avail,
'Lord! how to wed her?' thus he wailed.

A charming form I must assume, of beauty and of grace,
To make the princess fall in love and garland on me place. 131

My form the Lord can dazzling make,
To go to him much time will take;
Yet Lord my welfare has in mind,
He'll surely help, to me e'er kind.

Thus muni thought, to Lord he prayed,
Lo! Lord appeared Mercy arrayed.
Seeing Lord the muni's anguish ceased,
'Wish will bear fruit', his heart was pleased.

The sage his hearts anguish disclosed,
'Lord help me, faith in Thee reposed,

Give me Thy form of dazzling hues,
Or else I will the maiden lose.

Whatever will bring me welfare,
Deign soon, I Thy devotion bear.'
Seeing power of His own Maya's spell,
Lord smiled and spoke to pain dispel:

'Hail Narada! in whatever way your welfare really lies,
I shall contrive, depend on Me, my words untruth despise. 132

In illness urge for food one feels,
Physician gives what ailment heals;
I'll give you help for welfare your,'
Saying this the Lord was seen no more.

The sage was cast in Maya's spell,
On Lord's deep words he did not dwell.
To steps retrace he turned around,
In joy he reached swayamvara ground.

Each king for his throne found a place,
And sat adorned with sumptuous grace.
The muni smiled, to himself said:
'From me apart, none will she wed'.

The Lord for muni's own welfare,
Gave face so ugly, all would scare.
But this to others was unknown,
As Narada came, each bowed from throne.

Two hosts of Shiva who knew this farce were also present there,
Disguised as Brahmans, seeing all, to Narada thither fared. 133

Where Narada sat aglow in pride,
Hosts of Shiva went, sat by his side.
In Brahmans dress their form concealed
To none was their true self revealed.

They softly said for sage to hear:
'Fine beauty Lord bestows!' they sneer.
'His glamour shall princess ensnare,
As if a god will garland wear.'

Sage did not heed their jesting words,
Fates had him with deep passion stirred.

As Shiva's hosts riled, so grew his pride,
With eager joy to claim the bride.

None could see muni's face ill-graced,
But princess saw his ugly face.
Within her heart she fumed with rage,
Seeing grinning monkey form of sage.

Like stately swan she walked between her sakhis in the hall,
With garland in her lotus hands, she saw the princes all. 134

T'wards Narada sitting in his place,
She did not step even a pace.
In eager thrill sage trembling rose,
Shiva's hosts smiled at his passion's woes.

Lord too as prince assembly graced,
On Him the princess garland placed.
Lord claimed the bride beauty arrayed,
Princes assembled gazed dismayed.

Narada had his discernment lost,
Seeing princess gone in anguish tossed,
As if *mani* form him was robbed.
'See face in mirror!' Shiva's hosts scoffed.

Saying this Shiva's hosts ran afeard,
In water muni's face appeared;
Seeing monkey's face, rage boiled untamed,
He cursed Shiva's hosts in words inflamed.

Be born as demons both of you, O sinners full of guile,
You mocked me but another sage, beware you do not rile. 135

When Narada looked again in waters of the pool, he was amazed to see the reflection of his own face. He could not believe what he saw and decided to confront the Lord. As Narada turned, he saw the Lord in front of him. "O muni!" he said gently, "where are you going in such anguish?"

Narada could not control his anger. "You cannot tolerate another man's wealth", he stormed: "You maddened Shiva when the Ocean was churned and made him drink poison. You gave wine to asuras and poison to Shiva! You took *mani* and Lakshmi for yourself. You are selfish and trickster! 136

You gave me a monkey's face and made me lose the princes. You shall suffer for the love of a woman and monkeys shall assist you."

The Lord calmly accepted Narada's curse and appeasing the muni, withdrew His Maya. 137

Shiva then narrated the story of the past birth of the earthly parents of the Incarnation of the Lord in the dazzling form of Rama. In days gone by, here lived a famous king named Svayambhuva. Even Vedas sing of the greatness of this noble and holy king and of his queen Satrupa. To these was born Uttanpad, who was the father of Dhruva, a celebrated, devotee of the Lord.

Svayambhuva was a righteous king and ruled for many years, upholding the cause of dharma. In his old age he gave his kingdom to his son Uttanpad and retired to the forests with his queen Shatrupa. They lived there for many years, fasting and meditating upon the Name of the Lord. So great was their devotion that within their hearts they yearned to behold the dazzling form of the Lord in which He had revealed Himself to Shiva. Pleased with the great devotion of the aged king and queen, the Lord appeared to them and granted them a boon of their choice. 148

Moved with highest ecstasy, the king humbly asked the Lord to grant him a son like the Lord Himself. The Lord blessed the king and said that his desire would be fulfilled. In time to come he would be born as the King of Ayodhya and the Lord would Incarnate Himself as his son. 149

After narrating the beautiful story of the previous birth of King Dashratha and his queen Kaushilya, Shiva told Parvati the story of the birth of the terrible Ravana and his brothers who, overcome with the arrogance of their might, devastated the earth till Rama destroyed them to redeem the woes of His devotees.

In days gone by there was a famous king whose name was Satyaketu. He ruled over the mighty kingdom of Kayke. The king had two valiant sons named Pratapbhanu and Arimardan. The two brothers were very much attached to each other and in his old age the king bestowed his kingdom upon Pratapbhanu and went into the forests for meditation. King Pratapbhanu ruled wisely with his minister, Dharmaruchi and his brother Arimardan. He conquered all the neighbouring kingdoms with his mighty army and lived in prosperity. All his subjects were happy and contented. 153, 154

One day, while Pratapbhanu was hunting in the forests he saw a beautiful boar. Striving to shoot it with his arrows, he chased the animal far into the woods but could not kill it. Disappointed, he returned homewards. As he wandered about, tired and thirsty, he was delighted to see an ashram which he entered to quench his thirst. 156, 157

Now one of the kings who had been defeated in battle by Pratapbhanu had disguised himself and had taken refuge in this very ashram. He recognised the king immediately and welcomed him. With various guiles the defeated king, disguised as a hermit, won Pratapbhanu's confidence. As was the custom of royalty, the king had not disclosed his name, but the

crafty hermit, claiming supernatural powers, told him that he knew he was Pratapbhanu. He told the astonished king that he was immortal and gave his name as 'Ektanu' that is, of single body. He had taken this name, he said, because from the beginning of creation his soul had resided only in one body. This he claimed, was a gift from the gods in recognition of his great devotion and tapa. 162

The cunning king then made a pretense of great affection for Pratapbhanu and requested him to ask for a boon. Misled by him, the brave king asked him to grant him a similar boon of eternal life, free from old age and infirmities, and that none may be able to vanquish him in battle.

Finding Pratapbhanu completely under his spell, the wicked king told him that his wish would be granted, but he would have to propitiate the Brahmins. This could be achieved if he invited them to a feast to which he would come in disguise and cook food to be served to them. Once they took the charmed food the would be propitiated and he would become immortal and invincible. 168

On the appointed day Pratapbhanu invited thousands of Brahmins to a feast. A sumptuous food had been prepared for them. There were delicious dishes of the six different tastes taken in four ways. But just as the Brahmins sat at the feast, a voice was heard from the heavens: "O Brahmins! touch not this food, it is defiled with flesh of a brahmin!" 172

Pratapbhanu was exceedingly perplexed and was speechless. The brahmins rose in anger and pronounced a terrible curse upon him. "O low Kshattriya!" they exclaimed, "you have invited families of brahmins seeking to destroy their dharma! God has protected us! May you along with your family be destroyed and be born amongst the demons!" 173

While Pratapbhanu stood in stunned silence, a voice was again heard from the heavens: 'O brahmins! you have been hasty in your utterance! The king is innocent!'

The mischief had already been done and the curse had been pronounced. When Pratapbhanu went to the kitchen he found that the cook had disappeared. 174

Meanwhile the wicked king had informed all other kings defeated by Pratapbhanu that he now lay under a curse of destruction. They stormed Pratapbhanu's mighty kingdom with huge armies from all directions. Pratapbhanu and his men fought gallantly to the last man. They were ultimately overwhelmed and destroyed.

'O Bharadwaj!' said Yajnavalkya, 'when the Lord does not grant His Mercy, particles of dust become the size of Mount Sumera; one's parents turn hostile like Yama, the god of Death; a coil of rope turns into a snake.' 175

Pratapbhanu was born as Ravana, the demon king. His younger brother

Arimardan was born as Kumbhakarna. His minister Dharmaruchi was born as his step brother Vibhishana. All the sons of Pratapbhanu and his followers were also born amongst the demons.

Even though they were born in the family of the famous sage Pulastya, due to the curse of the brahmins they fell into ways of the wicked and gradually became a terror for those pursuing the path of dharma. But before launching into their terrible atrocities, all the three brothers performed difficult 'tapasya' which won favours from the gods who agreed to grant them boons of their choice.

Engaged in penance deep they fared,
So rigorous that no one had dared.
Their penance gods' favour invoked,
"Ask for a boon", then Brahma thus spoke.

Ravana implored, clasping His Feet,
"Lord of Creation! this I seek,
May I win over every race,
Humans and vanars I can face".

Bramha then said: "So may it be,
Your prayer and penance pleaseth me".
Then Brahma the mighty Kumbhkarna saw,
Seeing him the Creator stood in awe.

If this huge demon daily eats,
Victuals of earth shall soon deplete.
Saraswati contrived him to seek,
For full six months continuous sleep.

The Bramha to Vibhishana turned: "Son of your choice boon seek".
He asked for steadfast lasting love in the Lord's Lotus Feet. 177

Ravana married Mandodari, the beautiful daughter of Mai. He was delighted at having obtained a wise and beautiful wife. Thereafter he arranged the marriages of his two brothers.

Ravana lived lavishly, for ever seeking fulfilment of his sense pleasures. He also grew in might and he looked around seeking to conquer new kingdoms and to hold sway over mighty kings. Intoxicated with the strength of his arms, he forgot the favours granted to him by the gods, and sought to challenge them to become the monarch of all worlds.

4. TYRANNY OF THE DEMONS

As Ravana grew steadily in might, he built up an army of gallant warriors of formidable strength. Now in the midst of the ocean, there was the

kingdom of Lanka, situated on a three peaked mountain, most difficult of access. Mai, the demon, had built a magnificent palace of gold and jewels amidst the mountains and a iovely city famed for its beauty. A number of demon warriors had dwelt there in the past but they had been slain in battle. Indra had thereafter made it over to Kuvera, whose guards looked after the palaces and the beautiful city.
Ravana decided to conquer Lanka:

Of Lanka's wealth when Ravana heard,
His heart to seize the kingdom stirred.
Against his demons' fierce attack,
Laying arms the Yaksha guards flew back.

Proudly seeing Lanka he had seized
Ravana of his great might was pleased.
Of strong defence, with beauty laid,
Lanka his own abode he made.

A palace to each demon brave,
And other comforts Ravana gave.
Then Kuvera he turned to attack,
His Pushpak chariot he brought back.

He even went to Mount Kailash, lifted it like a toy.
His mighty strength he thus displayed, full of vain pride and joy. 179

Wealth, army, allies, victory, might,
Comforts, sons, glory and fame bright,
More did each day to him provide,
And with each gain grew fast his pride.

His brother Kumbhkarana of such might,
As never since has one seen light.
When drunk he slept for half a year,
On waking shook three worlds with fear.

'T was well for full six months he slept,
With what he ate, what would be left?
What words can of his war craft speak?
The best of warriors he did keep.

Brave Meghnad, Ravana's eldest son,
'Mongst warriors he was mightiest one!
In battle none could him dare face,
His name the gods in fear did take!

Durmukh, Akampana, Vajradanta, Atikaya were other demons great,

Warriors of formidable might, each could the world invade. 180

When Ravana once sat in his court,
He saw his warriors brave and bold.
Skilled in all wiles his demons seemed,
Of dharma or mercy they ne'er dreamed.

His sons and grandsons, warriors all,
In numbers vast, hard to recall.
Seeing his warriors he swelled in pride,
In boastful haughty words he cried:

"Hearken to me brave demons all!
The gods our mighty clan foes call.
Yet face to face come not to fight.
Seeing our great might they take to flight!

To bring their end there is a way.
Listen with care to what I say.
Defile their offerings, yajnas and prayer,
Go forth to end the strength they bear.

The famished gods lacking in strength, we will engage with ease,
We'll kill them, sparing only those, who do what us does please." 181

He first called Meghnad to his side,
Against the gods to him incite.
He said: "Son! gods of skill and might,
And those who have the pride to fight,

Capture them first, bound to me bring!"
Meghnad arose, bowing to his king.
Such orders to each warrior gave,
Then with a club went Ravana brave.

As Ravana walked, the whole earth shook,
He thundered forth, babes wombs forsook!
Hearing him ere he, came in sight
Gods ran to Sumer's caves to hide.

The lovely grounds of gods' abode
Ravana found empty as he strode.
Roaring like tiger, wrath infused,
He challenged and the gods abused.

In battle's lust, Ravana earth sped,
But nowhere warriors challenge met!

Sun, moon, ocean, Kuvera and breeze,
Fire, fate and death, who control these.

Kinnars, liberated, humans, gods,
He chased in wrathful frenzy wrought.
In Brahma's wide world all those of form,
Were soon at Ravana's mercy borne.

Driven with fear they bowed to him,
Bending to his outrageous whim.

By strength of arms defeat to all, mighty Ravana did bring.
Winning kingdoms in all twelve worlds, o'er them became the king, 182a
Virgins of Kinnars, humans, gods, by might of arms he carried,
Where e'er he lovely women found, he took by force and married.182b

The other demons likewise spread terror all around: burning villages and fields, carrying away women, defiling religious places where ever they went. The people of the world were sorely afflicted. Righteous men were afraid even of talking of dharma. Discourses on Vedas were no longer heard. Evil spread unhindered. No words can narrate the tyranny of the demons. What can be the limit of sins for those who were inamoured of violence? 183

5. THE EARTH'S INVOCATION FOR THE INCARNATION

"Bhavani!" said Shiva, "Earth's burden became unbearable with demons striding all over her surface, perpetuating such vice as had never been seen before.

Uma! consider all those who flout dharma and oppress other human beings by their evil actions to be demons."

Seeing people from dharma's ways depart,
Earth sighed in anguish, grieved in heart.

'I bear Seas, rivers, peaks which rise,
But vice's burden heavy lies.'
Earth saw all dharma ruthlessly swept,
Of Ravana's fear she silence kept.

Mother Earth then assumed the form of a Cow and went to saints and munis who had taken shelter from the demons. She related her woes to them and appealed for their assistance, but they were themselves helpless.

To Brahma's Abode the gods munis and gandharvas went to Mercy seek,
In form of Cow went Mother Earth burdened with fear and sorrows deep:

Bramha heard their woes but knew in heart of help to them he could not be,
He told the Earth: 'Immortal Lord served by you can help you and me.'
Now calm your anguished mind, and meditate on Hari's Feet,
To servers He is kind, He shall destroy your sorrows deep. 184 So

Gods restless sat to search a way,
'Where can we find the Lord to pray?'
'To heavens we should go', some said,
'He lives in Milky's Ocean's bed.'

As Love, Devotion, one impels,
For him the Lord in that Form dwells.
Girija! 'midst gods I too was there,
At time propitious thus declared:

'God always is, Pervading all,
He Manifests when Love doth call;
On land, in Time, Direction, Space,
Where He is not, show me that place.

Pervading life, Detached, Apart,
Seen by devotion like Fire's spark.
My words on all minds did prevail,
Brahma welcomed saying: 'Hail! O hail!'

Hearing my words, Brahma was pleased, enthralled enraptured eyes,
With folded hands, in steady voice, prayed face upraised to skies. 185
Hail to Thee Saviour of the gods! Protector of devotees hail!
Hail Lord of Ocean's daughter hail! Destroyer of vice and travail!
O sustainer of gods and earth! Thy Will unique and non-pariel!
We seek thy Mercy and Thy Grace! O God of Bounteous Nature hail!
O Indestructible! All Pervading! Highest Bliss! Infinite Abode!
Beyond Knowledge, senses and Maya! Lord Thy Mercy we invoke!
Freed from attachment on whom sages meditate with concentration,
Hail to Truth-Consciousness-Bliss! Of whom sages sing in devotion!
Who of Srishti is causeless Cause; Who of His Pleasure three worlds made,
Though prayer or worship we know not; Sin's Destroyer! We seek His Grace!
Who ends all fear of life and death, all woes redeems gives peace to saints,
From mind and action and from speech, to Him we pray: Redeem our pains!
Whom Vedas, sages and Saraswati, knowing not fully cannot describe,
Who shelter those who on Him wait, our hopes and faith in Him abide.

O Lord of Beauty! Lord of Wisdom! Lord of qualities and of peace!
Humans and sages on Thy earth, in deep distress Thy Mercy seek!
Knowing gods and earth were steeped in grief, hearing their call devout,
A sonorous Voice from Heavens came, dispelling fears and doubts. 186

Fear not sages and O ye gods!
For you I'll take a mortal garb,
I'll come myself in human form,
In Raghu's clan I will be born.

Kashyap Aditi did penance great,
To them a boon I had then made.
As Dashratha Kaushilya now born,
Kaushal's great kingdom they adorn.

As their son I shall take My birth,
As brothers four upon the earth.
By Narada's words I shall abide,
My Divine Consort by My side.

I shall earth of its burden clear,
O gods now renounce all your fear.

III. THE STORY OF RAMA

1. THE BIRTH OF THE LORD

Dashratha, the wise and noble king who ruled Ayodhya, was a dedicated upholder of dharma and a devotee of the Lord. The kingdom of Ayodhya was famed as the abode of righteousness as well as for its prosperity. The people of Ayodhya were gentle and peace loving. They lived in contentment and loved their kind and gentle king. 188

Amidst all the happiness that prevailed in the royal palaces and kingdom of Ayodhya the noble king was sad because he had no sons. His three wives: Kaushilya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi had no offsprings, and this cast a gloom over the king and his people.

Once the king related his grief to sage Vashist who recommended that a yajna be performed by the great rishi Sringi. Accordingly the rishi was invited to perform the yajna. As oblations were poured into the sacred fire, the god of fire himself stood amidst the flames, holding some of the yajna offering in his hand. Giving this to Dashratha he spoke: "O king! your desires shall be fulfilled. Divide this between your three wives in the manner you deem fit".

Exceedingly pleased within his heart, King Dashratha divided the food into two portions, and gave one half to his queen Kaushilya. He divided the other half into two portions and gave one part to queen Kaikeyi. The remaining portion he again divided in two parts and gave one each to Kaushilya and Kaikeyi. With their consent he then gave these portions to queen Sumitra.

In time to come four sons were born to the queens.

Auspicious was day date and time, propitious were the stars,
Nature and life bloomed in delight the day that Rama's birth marked. 190

In month of Chaitra midst astrals rare,
Of waxing moon the ninth day fair;
At midday, neither warm nor cold,
When peace did world entire enfold;

Cool, gentle, fragrant blew the breeze,
Saints felt aglow, the gods were pleased;
Flowers bloomed in woods, peaks dazzled bright,
Sweet nectar flowed in rivers sprite;

When gods and Brahma knew hour was nigh,
On cars celestial they did fly
Their dazzling steeds all o'er the sky.
While Gandharvas sung in rapture high.

Strewing flowers the gods did thither fare,
As drums resounded in the air.
The gods and sages wrapt in prayer,
Their humble offerings they did bear.

Their prayers said the host of gods for their abodes then left the earth,
The Lord Who grants peace to us all, the gentle Rama then took His Birth.
191

The Lord was born! The Gracious Rama! Mother Kaushilya's happy fate!
The mother rejoiced beholding the Form which sages heart does consecrate.
With blissfilled eyes she gazed upon the sky-blue Form, the limbs ornate,
The dazzling garlands, lotus eyes, the Lord resplendent Incarnate!
With folded hands the mother besought: "O Lord! to You how may I pray?
You are Infinite, beyond Maya and Knowledge as the Vedas say.
In songs of Srutis and of saints, You're Blissful Ocean, Mercy's Ray,
Devotees Saviour! For Redemption You have taken birth today!
Vedas sing that in Your Body, Maya's Universe is confined,
You have been within my womb! This will waver sages' mind!"

The Child Divine His mother heard and showed His Forms of wondrous kinds!
Told her tales of earlier legends, till she yearned to see her child.
Then Kaushilya spoke to the Lord: "Leave this Form for me, my son!
Be my child which for a mother is her happiest possession".
Heeding her words the God of gods cried like a little one!
Those who sing this song of the Lord, reap fruits of His devotion.

The Lord Incarnated Himself for redemption of humanity,
Out of Himself, Of His Pleasure, unaffected by Prakriti. 192

The king was filled with joy beyond measure on being informed of the birth of Rama. Guru Vashist blessed the child and gay were the rejoicings that filled the royal palace and the kingdom of Ayodhya.

Shortly thereafter Queen Kaikeyi gave birth to a lovely boy and Queen Sumitra bore twins. Never had such rejoicings been witnessed in Ayodhya. Resplendent indeed were the decorations. As if Night herself had come to pay obeisance to the Lord, but seeing the Sun, stood shyly hesitant for a moment. Yet, unable to restrain herself, she came softly in the form of Twilight with the fragrant smoke of incense as her mantle, the gleaming red tint of *abir* scattered in the air and the crimson hue of the sky blending into the complexion of her body, warm with delight as she came surreptitiously to gaze at Rama. Jewels studded in the palace walls were like stars and the lovely domes above shone like moons. The soft music of recitation of Vedas was like sweet songs of birds.

A day's span turned into a month, this none could comprehend,
The Sun god with his chariot stayed, how could the day then end ? 195

This wonder none could understand,
The Sun god went, of Glory sang.
Gods sages saw rejoicings great,
To homes returned praising their fate.

Another secret I disclose,
Girija! thy fate in Rama reposed,
Bhusundi, I, were also there,
In human form we thither fared.

In highest bliss, with pleasure thrilled,
We walked with rapturous joy instilled.
This happy state he 'lone can know,
On whom Rama doth His Grace bestow.

Whoever came with his own wants,
The noble king with pleasure grants.

Elephants chariots diamonds gold
Garments and many gifts untold.

All were enthralled and surged with joy to babes their blessings give,
May Tulsi's Lords, the princes four, happy for ever live. 196

Many days passed in sweet delight,
None know the end of day or night.
Then came the day for Naming rites,
Vashisht was called in gathering bright.

Praying to the gods, the king exclaimed:
'As thou hast thought, let them be named'.
Said sage: 'Their Names shall glory bring,
I'll say as reads my mind, O king!

Ocean of Joy, Star of Welfare,
Mere drop from which three worlds peace bear,
Abode of Bliss, His Name is Rama,
His Mercy makes worlds peaceful, calm.

Who makes worlds prosper and sustains,
Bharat shall be his holy Name.
Dwelling on whom all foes are tamed,
Satrughan his Name in Vedas proclaimed.

Abode of Qualities, dear to Rama, who worlds for e'er protects,
Vashisht named him as Lakshmana, who bounteous fame projects. 197

Thus Vashisht named them from his heart,
Then said: 'Veda's essence they'll impart,
Shiva's heart, devotees' substance: sum,
As munis wealth your sons have come'.

From childhood Rama Lakshmana were near,
Engrossed in Rama's Feet, held him dear.
Bharat and Satrughan brothers two,
Serving Rama, to him nearer drew.

Sky-blue and fair, both lovely pairs,
Mothers break straw seeing beauty theirs.
All four Abodes of Form and Grace,
But Rama, Joy's Ocean took first place.

In his heart Moon of Mercy glows,
Which moonbeams of his sweet smile shows;
In cradle now, then lap alight,
'Dear child!' croons mother in delight.

The Immanent, Nirguna, Unborn Brahma, from Maya's web above,
In Kaushilya's lap deigns to lie, for His devotees love. 198

Like crores of Kama his sky-blue form,
Like blue lotus and rain clouds shone;
On red feet nails like lightning sparks,
Like red lotus with pearls are marked.

Vraja Dhwaj and Ankusha marks on Feet,
Sound of ankle-bells sages greet.
Three lines on waist where girdle lies,
Navel's charm known when seen by eyes.

With gems adorned his graceful arms,
Lion's nail on chest displays its charm.
Gem inlaid necklace on his breast,
Bhrigu's foot mark adorns his chest.

Neck shaped like conch, chin full of charm,
His face lovely like million Kamas
Parted red lips two teeth unbare,
His nose and *tilak*'s beauty rare.

Cheeks lovely, shapely are his ears,
Sweet lisping words his speech endears.
Soft and curly his silky hair
Which mother tends with loving care.

A dazzling yellow garment wears,
Seeing him on hands and feet endears.
Vedas Shesha cannot sing charm supreme,
One can feel thrill e'en seen in dreams.

Beyond Speech, Wisdom, Senses ken, in Whom Joy doth reside,
Entwined in parents' doting love, in childhood's deeds abides. 199

The four sons were brought up lovingly by the king and his queens. Rama was the darling child of the family. Sweet like moonbeams was his innocent smile winning hearts by its loveliness. Mother Kaushilya played fondly with the lustrous child. Sometimes she would take him in her lap or else watch him in fascination playing in his cradle. Once after bathing and dressing the child in beautiful clothes, she put him to sleep in his cradle. After saying her prayers and making offerings to the Lord, she went to the kitchen to have meals prepared for the day. As she passed her room on the return, she saw child Rama sitting in front of the Lord's image eating fruit offered to the Lord!

Kaushilya ran to the room where she had put the child to sleep, wondering who had carried him from there. Going into the room she was exceeding amazed to find him sleeping peacefully in his cradle! She returned to the room of the deities in panic, and lo! Rama was still there with a fruit in his small hands.

Kaushilya trembled within her heart, not believing her own eyes. Seeing his mother's confusion, the Lord smiled and blessed her with the vision of His Wondrous Forms.

Immortal, Endless, Wondrous form, to mother then He showed,
In every pore of Form Divine, millions of Universe glowed! 201

Countless Brahma Shiva bright Suns and Moons,
Seas, mountains, rivers forests bloom.
Time, Nature, Qualities, Wisdom, Acts,
She saw things beyond all known facts.

As she did Maya's power behold,
She trembling stood, her hands did fold.
She saw jiva cast in Maya's charm,
Devoted Love which saves from harm.

She stood enthralled and found not speech,
Then closed her eyes, bowed to His Feet,
Seeing mother in deep anguish lain,
The God became a child again.

She could not pray in turmoil wrought,
"The World's Father my son I thought!"
Calming her, Lord said: "Form I've shown,
Mother let not this e'er be known."

With folded hands Kaushilya then humbly the Lord besought,
"Lord! let me not by Maya's spell ever again be wrought." 202

Thus the four brothers grew up in splendour and the All Knowing Lord took lessons in the Vedas and all the dharmas like other mortal human beings.

2. RAMA AND LAKSHMANA GUARD VISHWAMITRA'S YAJNA

The great sage Vishwamitra had taken abode in an ashram situated in dense forests. This ashram was the ancient retreat of Kashyapa muni who had worshipped Lord Vishnu with deep devotion. So intense was his devotion and meditation of the Lord that ultimately Vishnu came to him

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as his son in the Vaman form. Siddhashram stood on this hallowed ground in which the sage Vishwamitra had taken abode. Many sages and saints came to participate in the yajnas that were performed there.

Now Ravana had ordered all his demons to terrorise saints and sages. Mareech and Subahu along with a number of other terrible demons lived in the forests near Vishwamitra's ashram, and they started defiling the yajnas performed there. Sages were helpless against the fury of their attacks. Vishwamitra was sorely distressed at raids by the demons. Sages and saints who used to flock to his ashram from far and wide, now kept away due to the vile acts of the demons. Vishwamitra knew that only God could help them in driving them away. The great sage also knew that the Lord had Incarnated Himself as the son of King Dashratha. His only hope therefore lay in bringing Rama to his ashram to drive away the demons. He decided to go to Ayodhya to request the king to send Rama and Lakshman with him to vanquish the demons and redeem sufferings of the saints. 'I will also behold the Lord Incarnate to my heart's content,' thought the illustrious sage within himself as he set forth for Ayodhya.

When King Dashratha was informed that sage Vishwamitra had arrived at the palace gates, he got up hurriedly to meet him. He escorted him respectfully to his palace and offered him his own exalted seat. After paying respects to the sage, he called his sons to bow before him and receive his blessings. 206

The sage was filled with ecstasy on beholding the dazzling form of Rama. He gazed at his resplendent face like an enraptured chakva looking at the full moon. The king then requested Vishwamitra to narrate the purpose of his visit: "Such honour, great sage!'' he said, "you had never bestowed upon me. What is your command, revered one! I will not delay to fulfil it".

Vishwamitra then explained how demons had been defiling their yajnas due to which most of the celebrated sages and saints now kept away from his ashram. "I have come to ask you to send Rama and Lakshman with me to vanquish the demons to enable us to perform our yajnas undisturbed and thus restore peace in my ashram."

"O King with pleasure send your sons, let not attachment stand in way,
You will earn dharma, eternal fame, over glory they shall hold sway." 207

Dashratha grew pale hearing these words,
His heart with filial love was stirred.
He said: "For sons born in old age,
You know not what you say good sage.

Ask what you will, our lands or treasure,
All shall I give to you with pleasure.

Life, body which are dear to heart,
With these too I shall gladly part.

All sons are dear to me alike,
But Rama is dearer than my life.
My two young sons you ask to send,
How can they 'gainst the demons fend ?"

As Dashratha spoke these love filled words,
The sage was with emotion stirred.
Vashist advised: "O King think well.
Of call of dharma and double dispel!"

The king then held his sons to heart,
Clasping them ere they would depart.
"They are my life", the sage he told,
"They're in your care, your hands they hold".

His royal blessings Dashratha gave, and with the sage his sons he sent,
The brothers took their mothers' leave before they on their journey went. 208a

Like tigers two, Rama and Lakshman, went forth the sages fears to end,
Oceans of Mercy! Gentle Wise! The cause to which all causes bend! 208b

Eyes red, broad chest and arms of grace,
Like blue lotus, his sky-blue face!
A quiver held at his waist band,
Bow slung o'er arm, arrow in hand.

Upon Rama Lakshman as he gazed,
The sage's heart with rapture blazed:
'Leaving his home and comforts all,
Rama hearkens to devotees call!'

Taraka the demoness soon they met,
Approaching them in fury set.
An arrow sharp Rama quickly sped.
Her curse redeemed as she lay dead.

Rama was Learning, well knew the sage,
Yet to the Lord he Knowledge gave.
Lessons to hunger, thirst o'er ride.
Knowledge of warfare, valour, might.

He taught them use of all weapons, and with them to his ashram came.
To grant His Mercy Rama had come, fresh fruit before the Lord he laid. 209

Next morning Rama thus told the sage:
"Perform your yajna, be not afraid!"
As music sweet of prayers did flow,
Arrows the brothers held to bow.

Hearing the hymns, in fury wrought,
Mareech his demon army brought.
An arrow blunt Rama deftly aimed,
His sprawling body ocean claimed!

Subahu next, Rama's arrow slew,
'Gainst Lakshmana's wrath their army flew,
The saints prayed freely, demons killed,
With songs of joy the woods were filled!

3. AHALYA'S REDEMPTION

Peace was restored in Vishwamitra's ashram, and sages now performed their yajnas without any hindrance. Rama and Lakshmana stayed in the ashram for some more days, much to the delight of all the inmates of the ashram.

One day Vishwamitra told Rama the story of Shiva's bow and of King Janaka of Mithila's vow to marry to Sita, his lovely daughter, to a prince who could string the bow. He requested the brothers to witness the assembly of princes who aspired to string the bow and marry the lovely maid.

Rama agreed to visit Mithila and they set out with sage Vishwamitra. While on their way they saw a desolate ashram:

Deserted did the ashram seem,
No bird nor beast in thicket green,
In stone an image Rama there saw
And heard the sage in wondrous awe:

"O Rama because of Gautam's curse, Ahalya waits in stone,
Redemption by Thy Lotus Feet, her deep sins to atone". 210
Ahalya stepped out of the rock as she received Rama's Benign Grace,
She saw the Lord, folded her hands, and gazed upon his wondrous face.
Her heart was full no words she found, she was with deep devotion weighed,
At the Lord's Feet she flung herself, tears streaming out upon her face.
Her heart grew calm, devotion filled, all trace of Maya from her flown,
As she in gentle voice thus prayed: "Hail to Thee Lord by Knowledge known!

A sinful woman Thou hast blessed! Merciful Guardian of forlorn!
O Lotus Eyed! Who sins forgives! I seek Thy refuge! Save me Lord!
My husband blessed me by his curse, it was for me a gift divine,
I have beheld my Gracious Lord, to Him I now my heart consign.
I have no wisdom, seek no knowledge, I have only one intent:
Grant me devotion of Thy Feet, I will consider life will spent.
The holy Ganga which Shiva holds, arises from Thy hallowed Feet,
Brahma worships them, I am blessed, resting my head upon those Feet!"
Thus praying Ahalya bowed again, seeking the Mercy of Rama's Feet,
She went to join her husband then, carrying the dust of the Lord's Feet.

Such is Lord Sri Ramchandra! says Tulsi. Shelterer of the distressed! The Compassionate One! Bestowing His Mercy without cause! O ignorant heart, cease wrangling and hypocrisy, and chant the lays of that Gracious Rama! 211

4. DIVINE LOVE

After bestowing His Divine Mercy upon Ahalya, Rama proceeded with sage Vishwamitra and brother Lakshman to the banks of Ganga. The sage narrated the beautiful story of how Ganga was brought to earth. The brothers bathed in the holy waters and soon reached Janakpur.

Rama and Lakshman were delighted to see the beautiful town. There were beautiful ponds and lakes with ghats whose steps were studded with jewels. Lovely lotus flowers bloomed in the lakes and bees hummed amidst the flowers. The beauty of houses and streets matched the loveliness of nature. Shops in the market places were full of most alluring merchandise. King Janaka's palaces were indeed a pleasure to behold. 212

Vishwamitra saw a shady mango grove and they decided to camp there. When King Janaka was informed that the illustrious sage Vishwamitra had arrived he hastened to pay respects to him, taking with him his chief priest Shatananda and other ministers. The king welcomed the august sage and while he talked to him, Rama and Lakshman who had gone to see the gardens, arrived.

The handsome youths sky-blue and fair,
A halo of bliss seemed to bear.
As Rama came all stood up to greet,
Near Vishwamitra he took his seat.

Seeing them all hearts with joy were thrilled,
Eyes fixed on them with peace were filled.
His sight in speechless wonder raised,
King Janaka at Rama's beauty gazed.

His heart was filled with happiness as bowing to the august sage,
Calming the rapture of his heart with deep love Janaka spake: 215

"Do these youths Brahmin race adorn?
Or are they Kshattriya princes born?
Or Brahma Himself of Whom Vedas sing,
Takes form on earth His Bliss to bring?

Seeing them my heart is filled with peace,
As if no more I wish to seek."
Smiled sage: "King you have spoken well,
In thy words Truth does always dwell.

All creation is by their love stirred."
Rama smiled whom sage's words he heard.
They're sons of Dashratha, Raghu's king,
They came in ashram peace to bring.

These handsome brothers Rama Lakshmana, Abodes of Might and Grace,
World witness bears, they demons killed, to guard yajna's sacred place.' 216

King said: "Beholding, sage thy feet,
I have earned fruits of my good deeds,
Sky-blue fair brother forms aglow,
To Bliss Itself they bliss bestow.

Pure and endearing love they bear,
Thrills heart; no words to say can dare.
By nature their love pure and deep,
Like Brahma and Shiva sweet company keep."

Betimes at brothers Janaka gazed,
His body thrilled heart rapture raised.
In palace fair with comforts laid,
The brothers with Vishwamitra stayed.

Providing comforts they required,
King to his own palace retired.

With sage the brothers took their food, to rest their tired limbs lay,
Then Rama Lakshmana together sat, twilight was ending day. 215

Lakshmana desired to see the town,
Janakpur's palaces of renown;
Of guru shy and brother afraid,
He quietly smiled and restless stayed.

His brother wishes Rama knew well,
Love for his love in his heart swelled.
He went to sage assent to seek,
And said in voice timid and meek:

"Sire! Lakshmana wishes town to see,
He speaks not of regard for thee.
If you permit, with him I'll go,
The town's good sights to quickly show."

Sage heard him and spoke words sincere,
"To good custom Rama e'er adheres.
O son! the path of dharma you take,
Your deeds are for devotees' sake.

Go see the beauty of the town, the splendour in it lies,
Let people of the town see you and feast their questing eyes." 218

Wherever they went, men, women and children flocked to see the gentle and handsome princes.

Next morning the brothers went to gather flowers for prayers. The sight of lovely blossoms in the king's gardens filled them with pleasure. Taking permission of the gardeners, they started collecting some of the beautiful flowers. 227

Meanwhile Sita had been sent by her mother to offer prayers to Parvati in her temple. She bathed in the cool waters of the lake in the palace gardens and went to offer prayers in the temple, beseeching the goddess with great devotion to grant her a husband suitable for her.

One of her maids who had strayed behind in the gardens amidst the flowering shrubs beheld the two dazzling princes as they gathered flowers in the gardens. She was amazed at their wondrous beauty, and wrought with excitement, she hastened back to Sita in the temple:

The maids saw her enraptured eyes, and rising colour in her cheek,
"Tell us what fills you with such joy," in gentle voices they beseech. 228

Said she: "Two princes I have seen,
Of dazzling beauty like a dream!
Sky-blue and fair! How to apprise!
Eyes cannot speak, speech has no eyes!"

Seeing Sita with sweet rapture thrilled,
Her maids were with deep pleasure filled.
Said one: "These princes yesterday,
With Vishwamitra came here to stay.

Their wondrous form and charming grace,
One everyone a spell has placed.
All Mithila sings of them with praise,
Come let us on their beauty gaze!"

Pure love did Sita's heart pervade,
Joy surged in her hearing the maid.
She followed, princes to behold,
Such ties of love can't be foretold.

Thinking of Narada's prophesy, Sita's heart brimmed with deep desire,
Her fawn like eyes darted around, her body glowed with love's pure fire. 229

Her tinking anklets as he heard,
Rama spoke to Lakshmana deeply stirred:
"This melody sounds like Kamadeva's song,
Some heavenly beauty comes along!"

He looked around in wondrous awe,
Till Sita's lustrous face he saw.
Seeing her, his eager eyes were fixed,
As if Nim had left his eyelids.

Beholding her, Rama was amazed,
Silently at her beauty gazed.
Brahma had in her all Beauty placed,
When Sita's lovely form he traced!

Her lovely beauty adorned Beauty.
Dazzling the bright Palace of Beauty.
No words can speak of Sita's beauty,
All have been used for lesser beauty!

Gazing at her loveliness, her image Rama in his heart kept,
And spoke to Lakshmana by his side, these words of purity and depth: 230

"Brother! she's daughter of the king,
To wed prince who Shiva's bow can string.
With maids she comes to Gauri pray,
She brightens every flowering spray,

Her beauty and her lovely form,
With pure love does my heart adorn.
God knows the reason of my urge,
Good omens do in my blood surge.

You know the nature of our clan,
Our heart can brook no evil plan.
I have firm faith in my pure mind.
Not e'en in dreams for maidens pine.

We come of those who throw not arms,
We are not moved by woman's charms.
To those who seek alms we are kind,
Such noble clans are hard to find."

Thus Rama spoke to Lakshmana softly, while his heart was wrapt in Sita,
Absorbed in her dazzling beauty, like a moth imbibing nectar. 231

Eagerly Sita sought his form,
Wondering where the prince had gone.
Where she turned her fawn like eyes,
Buds opened into flowers and smiled.

Then a maid showed her the pair,
'Midst flowering boughs, sky-blue and fair,
Her questing eyes were lit with pleasure,
As if at last they'd found their treasure.

She gazed upon his face entranced,
Her eyelids drooped not as she glanced.
Steeped in deep love she seemed to swoon,
Like chakori gazing at the moon.

Fixing his image in her heart,
She closed her eyes to keep it barred.
The maids when Sita love lost found,
Demurred, in silence stood around.

The two brothers just then appeared, amidst the lovely flowering boughs,
Like two shining moons had emerged, from curtains of thin whisping clouds. 232

Bodies of both brothers beauteous,
Dazzling like blue and pink lotus.
Peacocks' feathers held in hair,
Lovely blossoms here and there.

Faces bright with tilak marks,
Gems in ears like glittering sparks.
Curved eyebrows, lustrous hair curled,
Eyes like lotus buds unfurled.

Graceful chins and smile enchanting,
Lovely cheeks the heart enticing,
Face so glamorous, lips so lively,
Making Kamadeva blush with envy.

Shapely limbs and conch like neck,
Garlands sweet, bodies to deck.
Graceful Rama on the flowering ground,
Maids beheld in awe, spellbound.

His deerlike waist was draped in silk, looking like glamour's treasure.
The wondrous beauty of his form, the maids saw lost in pleasure. 233

A maid then gently in words calm,
Said softly, holding Sita's arm:
"Of Parvati, think later dear,
Behold the prince till he is here"

Sita her eyes then shyly raised,
And at the dazzling prince she gazed
Her eyes on graceful body stayed,
Her father's vow her heart dismayed!

Seeing her love lost, a gentle maid,
Said slowly : "Let's return, we're late".
Another whispered with a smile:
"We'll come tomorrow for a while!"

Sweet Sita's face blushing appeared,
Delayed, from mother chiding feared.
Calmly she brought Rama in her heart,
Resigned to fate she turned to part.

As if to see birds, deer and flowers, she turned eyes to behold,
The handsome form of Gracious Rama, love grew a hundred fold. 234

Shiva's bow was hard to draw she knew,
With Rama in heart, sadly withdrew.

Lovely Sita with love aglow,
When Rama saw from the garden go:
With highest joy, seeing her depart.
He kept her image in his heart!

Once more to Uma, Sita hied,
Beseeching her she humbly sighed:

"O Daughter of Himwant! Parvati!
Beloved of Mahadeva! Hail to Thee!
Mother of Ganesha, Swamikartikji!
O Goddess of Beauty! Hail to Thee!

Thou hast no beginning, middle or end,
Vedas know not power Thou doth wend.
Creator, Sustainer, Destroyer as well,
All pleasures and sorrows in Thee dwell!

Thou worshipest Thy husband as Thy god, O Mother of ideal womanhood!
A thousand Saraswatis cannot describe Thy mercy great, O goddess good! 235

Granter of four fruits to Thy devotee!
Bestower of wishes! Beloved of Shivaji!
O Goddess! beseeching Thy Lotus Feet,
Gods, saints, humans get highest peace!

What I desire Thou knowest well,
Thou doth in all hearts ever dwell!
So I disclose not what I seek."
Thus prayed Sita and clasped her feet.

Her love on Parvati cast a spell,
The image smiled, a garland fell!
She placed it gently on her head,
As with deep love the image said:

"Listen Siṭa to blessings mine,
Yearning of thy heart shall be thine!
Narada's prophesy no prayer requires,
Thou shalt wed prince of thy desires!

The lovely prince thou hast chose, shall be thine Sita be sure,
He is Merciful and All knowing, thus he knows thy love deep and pure."
Hearing the goddess' blessings, Sita's heart was filled with peace,
Back she went into the palace, hailing Gauri Lotus Feet! 236

Meanwhile the two brothers returned to their guru. Rama apprised Vishwamitra of their meeting with Sita in the gardens of King Janaka's palace. Thus sage took the flowers and performed his devotions. He then blessed the two brothers: "May your desires be fulfilled!"

Rama and Lakshmana were delighted at the sage's words. Vishwamitra then recited some legends of the past. Soon it was night and the sage retired to bed.

The moon came out in the eastern sky. With thoughts Sita in his heart, Rama gazed upon its beauty. As deep love stirred within him, Rama reasoned that the moon was not fit to be compared with Sita's dazzling beauty:

Seeing full moon rising in the east,
Thinking of Sita, Rama found peace;
Heart steeped in love Rama then thought:
The moon like Sita's face is not.

Poison's kin, salty ocean born, dark spots upon you bear,
You're dull by day, with Sita's face how can one you compare? 237

You wax and wane, make lovers pine,
Rahu devours you in his line.
The chakva's grief, lotus buds doom,
You're full of blemish, O poor moon!

To liken you to Sita's face,
Would bring to her beauty disgrace!

Thus did Rama, while gazing at the moon, recall within his heart the dazzling beauty of Sita's lovely face.

Thus was born earthly love in the earthly heart of the All Pervading Lord in the wondrous drama of His earthly life to redeem the woes of earthly beings.

In the morning when Rama awoke he told Lakshmana: "Look brother! the day has dawned to the delight of the lotus, the chakva and all mankind."

Lakshmana folded his hands and spoke in gentle words: "As the sun rises, the light of the twinkling stars fades away and the kumudini blooms droop even as kings assembled here lose heart hearing of your arrival. The tiny stars with their faint light cannot dispel dismal darkness even as the princes shall fail to string Shiva's bow. 238

Even as the dawn brings delight to the lotus, chakva, and bees; so O Lord Thy devotees will rejoice when Thou shalt string the bow. The Sun shall rise! Darkness shall be dispelled without effort! The stars shall go into oblivion! Brilliant light shall pervade the earth!"

The Lord smiled at his brother's ominous words.

5. SITA'S SVAYAMVARA: THE PRINCE WHO STRINGS SHIVA'S BOW!

King Janaka called Shatananda and asked him to convey his invitation to sage Vishwamitra and the two princes to witness Sita's svayamvar

ceremony. On receiving the invitation Vishwamitra said: "Sons! King Janaka has requested our presence. Let us come and witness Sita's ceremony and see who God Wills to win the fair maiden's hand." 239

"O Lords!" said Lakshmana, "the one who receives thy blessings shall surely be the one to win the honour!"

As Rama and Lakshmana arrived in the assembly, the attendants conducted them to their seats. The two princes were epitomes of beauty. All eyes were turned towards Rama. Each saw in the graceful prince, the embodiment of his own innate nature: 240

According as one was inclined,
Rama's nature each did different find.

Brave warriors found might in his form,
As if Valour in him was born.
The wicked kings trembled with fear,
As if a giant fierce was near.

Demons who sat disguised as king,
Saw him as one who Death does bring.
The townsmen him as jewel saw,
Peace in their hearts from him to draw.

Women found in them what they liked, seeing him with joyous hearts,
As if in human form was born, all forms of Beauty's arts. 241

The learned saw his Virata Form,
Many mouths, eyes, heads and arms.
To Janaka those related near,
He seemed as one unto them dear.

The king and queen's joy none can tell,
In their hearts Rama as son did dwell!
Yogis saw him knowledge composed,
Peaceful, pure, dazzling and reposed.

Devotees in the brothers found
Emblems of peace and pleasure bound.

To speak of love in Sita's heart,
O seeing her lord, words have no art.
She felt its glow, its blissful pleasure,
But found no words for rapture's measure.

Thus each found in Rama what he sought,
Seeing him according to his thought.

Of princes two of Kaushal king, all glory thrilled behold.
Sky-blue and fair their graceful forms, world's thirsting eyes to hold. 242

Seeing the radiant glory of Rama, many of the princes despaired of competing against him for Sita's fair hand. Others who were full of pride of their strength muttered that they would win the maiden even by strife if need be. The wise and righteous tried to reason with them: "Do not be given to boastful pride! Rama will undoubtedly string Shiva's mighty bow and wed the lovely princess. Witness with delight this great feat of strength and glory of this auspicious occasion!"

King Janaka then asked for Sita to be brought into the assembly. What words can describe the form and glory of Janaki, mother of the Universe!

For Sita's beauty words to use
Which foolish poet would dare to choose ?
Known words to describe are not fit,
For lesser beauty they've been writ.

No words can Sita's looks adorn,
Wealth of her beauty and her form,
With others if one does compare,
Was such beauty born any where?

Talkative Saraswati? Ardhangini Parvati?
With formless husband pensive Rati?
Lakshmi midst wine and poison born?
Can one liken to Sita's form?

Of nectar if there was a sea,
The Tortoise Beauty itself be,
Glory the rope, Adornment: hill,
Such ocean Kama churns with his skill,

The Lakshmi who would thus emerge, of Beauty and of Grace,
With faltering mind, in small measure, poet may near Sita place! 247

Wise sakhis Sita slowly bring
Auspicious songs they softly sing,
In dazzling saree dressed form fair,
Is there an image to compare?

All jewels dazzle in their place,
Each limb adorned with matchless grace,
As Sita paced svayamvara ground
All men and women were spellbound.

In joy the gods their drums resound,
Apsaras scatter flowers around;
In lotus hands the garland held,
All princes watch her love impelled.

Her darting eyes Rama's image sought,
Witless princes in love were wrought,
She saw brothers turning around,
Her eyes lit as if treasures found.

In vast assembly amidst sage, Sita demurred blushing and shy,
She kept Rama's image in her heart and to her sakhis turned her eyes. 248

In Sita and Rama's beauty lost,
To close their eyelids all forgot.
They feel in heart but scared to say,
To God in silence humbly pray:

'From folly, Lord, make king to part,
Grant him the wisdom of our hearts.
Sans remorse, let him vow forget,
And Rama to lovely Sita wed.

This all desire, the king will praise
If he persists, grieved hearts will blaze.'
Enthralled in minds, all thus observe:
'Sita the sky-blue prince deserves.'

Royal bards were summoned by the king,
Songs of Janaka's glory they sing.
The king asked them to announce vow,
With joy to King Janaka they bow.

Janaka's announcers then spoke: "Hearken O valiant kings:
News of the vow King Janaka took, with our arms raised we bring! 249

To all is known Shiva's mighty bow,
To strength it does challenge throw!
Ravana, Banasura in valour's sway
Beheld the bow but kept away.

This bow of Shiva which you here brings,
Who in this royal assembly strings,
To such a mighty warrior brave,
To wed Sita, Janaka word gave!"

Tempting the vow, fair was the prize,
Kings vain of strength to try did rise.
Girding their loins with faces proud,
Naming their deities with heads bowed,

They looked at it in spirit bold,
Then quickly tried the bow to hold.
Heaving and straining, trying to lift,
But could not make it even shift.

Kings to whom reason did appear,
Kept to their seats coming not near.

On failing foolish kings returned, ashamed within their heart,
The bow looked heavier and heavier, as more and more took part. 250

A thousand kings thus tried their strength,
But failed and sadly back they went.

The mighty bow remained intact,
Like lust fails widows to detract.
The kings found their valour denounced,
Like saints who had not world renounced

Victory, fair name and glorious might,
Losing to bow, some took to flight.

Failing in hearts others despaired,
And to their seats in shame repaired.
Seeing none succeed, Janaka disturbed,
Spoke words in anger deeply stirred:

"My vow brings from many a land,
To try and win fair Sita's hand.
In human form e'en gods descend,
With kings and warriors to attend.

But no one yet seems to be born who can Shiva's great bow string,
To win the young maiden's fair hand, glory and fame to bring. 251

Who does not like such prize to win,
But no one can Shiva's great bow string.
When none has strength its weight to cope,
Of stringing there can be no hope.

No longer need you show false pride,
Brave kings on earth do not reside.

Depart now hope from heart denied,
She's fated not to be a bride.

In dharma's name I had taken vow,
Maiden for ever she'll be now.
I knew not gone had valour's day,
When faith in my vow I had lay."

His words as men and women heard,
They gazed at Sita in grief stirred.
In anger Lakshmana eyebrows arched,
Eyes red, lips quivering and parched.

He stood silent respecting Rama, but Janaka's words like arrows sped,
Unable to restrain himself, these ominous words he boldly said:

"Where one of Raghu's clan does fare,
To speak such words one does not dare!
King Janaka's words on Rama cast slur,
Who knows his might does not so err.

O Lotus Sire! Of Raghu's tribe!
I speak from nature not from pride!
O Rama! I only wait your call,
I'll lift this great bow like a ball!

O Lord, by your power and Grace,
I can e'en Mount Sumera displace!
King Janaka's grief is of no matter,
Like pitcher I can this bow shatter!

O Lord! give me your assent please,
I'll string this bow in playful ease.
Like lotus stem I'll lift this bow,
A hundred miles carrying it go.

By grace of your power my Lord, like mushroom I will break this bow,
Failing which by your Feet I swear, I'll never touch bow and arrow." 253

Words of Lakshmana bold and terrible,
Made earth rock and elephants tremble.
Kings amazed, with fear were taken,
Sita pleased, Janaka stood shaken.

Vishwamitra and Rama were pleased,
With delight their hearts besieged.
Rama motioned Lakshmana to be calm,
Around his shoulder placed his arm.

Vishwamitra knowing the time was ripe,
Spoke words full of love and delight:
"To string the bow, O Rama, arise,
Bring peace to Janaka: win the bride!"

Bowing to him Rama then did start,
No pleasure, pride within his heart.
With graceful steps he walked in state.
Putting to shame a tiger's gait.

Like dazzling sun the Lord arose, towards Udayachal like canopy,
All eyes alight like glittering bees, like lotus faces bloomed happy. 254

Kings vain hopes were like night repelled,
Their boastful talk like stars dispelled.
Arrogant kings with shame were ridden.
Crafty kings like owls were hidden.

Gods in heavens, sages below,
By showering flowers their joy did show.
Rama bowed to sages as he went,
To string the bow seeking consent.

The gentle Rama moved without haste,
Like elephant with majestic gait.
As nearer Rama came Shiva's bow's way,
Men and women with joy did pray.

They meditated on their gods,
Recalled good actions in their thoughts,
Beseeched Ganesha strength him to gift,
The bow like lotus stem to lift.

As Sita's mother saw Rama rise, for his welfare moved with love deep.
She beckoned to her trusted maids, and softly to them thus did speak: 255

"O why do all just watch the fun,
Of all our friends not even one
Goes to explain the august sage,
Such tasks are not for tender age.

The bow which Ravana dared not touch,
Kings gave up after trying so much.
That bow he sends a child to break,
Can gentle swan Mandrachal shake?

The king is silent, he should speak,
What is God's Will, why no one heeds?"
Then gently spoke a maiden wise.
"Power does not depend on size.

Agastya the sage, in pitcher born,
Dried oceans deep and his name shone.
The sun itself though small in size,
Darkness dispels as it does rise.

The holiest mantra the smallest is, but Bramha Vishnu Mahesh contains,
The mighty elephant largest is, but ankush small its power restrains.

The god of love with flowered bow,
Keeps humans charmed with his arrow.
O queen you should thus have no doubt,
The bow's stringing he'll bring about."

The queen's mind then was set at rest,
Her love increased and Rama she blest.
As Sita then beheld the Lord,
She trembled and implored the gods.

She prayed in anguish deeply seized,
"O Parvati! on me be pleased!
Grant me my prayer humble meek,
Make light the bow for love I seek!

O Ganesha! Grant today my boon!
I prayed for this day! Hearken soon!
I beg your hear! Strength to him bring,
Make light the bow for him to string!"

Her fawn like eyes fixed upon Rama, to gods above she calmly prayed,
Her lovely eyes were full of tears, her body in tremulous state. 257

She gazed on Rama with love intent,
Despaired of vow the king was bent.
A heartless vow the king has wrought,
Of loss or gain he has not thought.

His courtiers give him not advice,
'Mongst learned men this is not right!
The heavy bow is hard to string,
Of tender body is the prince.

O God how can I heart control,
Can bud in diamond drill a hole?
This court is mad, no one has spoke,
Shiva's bow! you're now my only hope!

Your spell on those present here cast,
Make yourself light! Give him help fast!
Thus Sita in her heart did fret,
Each moment like eternal spread.

Now at the Lord, now at the ground, her fawn like eyes turned up and down,
So lovely that it seemed on moon, two fish of love sported around. 258

Night like shyness within her welled,
Tears from the ends of her eyes swelled.
Speech like black bees in lotus held,
Like gold in treasure was withheld.

She calmed her mind, distress restrained,
With faith inspired, her heart restrained.
'If love in body, mind is pure,
If my heart's love for him is sure,

God knower of all hearts shall me make,
The gracious Rama's dear humble maid.
On whom one's heart one truly plights,
Such love God does surely unite!'

Beholding Rama she made love firm,
Rama knew what thoughts in her did swirl.
He gazed at her then turned to bow
Like Garuda seeing a snake below.

When Lakshmana saw the Gracious Rama had set his eyes upon the bow,
He bowed to gods within his heart, and spoke with his body aglow: 259

'O Elephants! Shesha! O incarnates!
Hold fast the earth! let it not shake!
Lord Rama goes forth to string the bow,
Be ready now! my orders know!

As nearer to the bow Rama came,
All men and women took God's Name.

The people's skeptic needless doubt,
The arrogance of princes proud,

Vanity of Parashurama's claims,
The dubious fears of sages, saints,

Sita's distress, the king's regret,
The queen's anguish which made her fret,
Upon Shiva's bow, as on a raft,
Sat on it waiting for the craft

To o'erride ocean of Rama's might,
But doubts an oarmen could not sight!

Rama saw the people all around, gazed at the bow lost in deep thought,
Then he beheld lovely Sita, and saw her with anguish distraught. 260

He saw his love sad and forlorn,
Each moment into ages drawn.
Mused he: 'If thirsty one should die,
Useless would ponds of nectar lie!

When crops wither, of what use rain?
Time lost, repentance what avail?'
Thus musing, Rama at Sita gazed,
Seeing her love lost his body blazed.

Bowing to the sage, Rama grasped the bow,
His graceful limbs grew taut; and lo!
Shiva's mighty bow like lighting shone,
In sheer majesty upright borne!

How strung, how pulled, this no one saw,
All stood in wonder and in awe.
As Rama pulled bow, in two it broke,
The world entire by its sound arose!

A deafening sound spread round the world, the sun stood faltering in its course,
The Tortoise Shesha and Boar tottered, Elephants groaned, earth shook its force.
Demons sages and gods trembled, closing their ears to stop its sound,
Shiva's bow was broken, says Tulsi, soon joyous greeting did resound!
Shiva's mighty bow the raft of doubt, on Ocean of Rama's strength was bound,
All doubts that were then heaped on raft, now in the tossing ocean drowned! 261

Rama placed the two broken pieces of the bow on the ground. The

people rejoiced at Rama's victory. Seeing Rama's moonlike face, Vishwamitra's love, like the clear unfathomed depth of ocean, swelled with waves of joy.

Amidst singing of hymns and playing of soft music, Shatananda asked Sita to be brought before Rama.

Escorted by her pretty maids, singing a melodious song,
Sita dazzling in every limb, came like a baby swan. 263

Between her maids Sita did look,
Like Beauty Queen midst Beauty stood.
In lotus hands she garland held,
As if o'er world it victory spelled.

Zeal in her heart, shy was her pace,
Her love intense no one could trace.
She drew near and Rama's beauty saw
She stood entranced in love thrilled awe.

Seeing her love lost, a wise young maid,
Whispered to her to garland place.
In both hands Sita garland took,
O'ercome with love her fair hands shook.

Like stemmed lotus trembling would seek,
To place on dazzling moon a wreath.
The maids then sung to break love's spell,
The garland on Rama's shoulders fell.

Seeing garland on Rama placed, gods shower blossoms from Heavens,
All kings sit back disgraced, like lilies wilt seeing Sun arise. 264 So

Drums sounded on the earth and sky,
Good men were pleased, wicked were shy.
In joy gods, men and sages sing,
'Hail! Hail! O hail!' and blessings bring.

The wives of gods dance and sing,
Handful of flowers all over fling.
Brahmans with lays from Vedas acclaim,
Bards sing glory of Janaka's fame.

In three worlds fame of this deed spreads:
'Rama strings Shiva's bow and Sita weds!'
With aratis men and women greet,
Give lavish gifts to whom they meet.

In pair of Rama and Sita sweet,
It seems Beauty Adornment meets.
Her friends tell Sita: 'Touch Rama's Feet'.
Sita demurs, love's ties are deep!

Sita demurs from touching feet recalling wife of Gautam's fate,
Raghu's Lord smiled within his heart, at love unearthly, deep and great. 265

6. THE WICKED KINGS DISCONTENT AND PARASHURAMA'S RAGE

Seeing the glamorous Sita standing before Rama, some wicked kings were inflamed with desire. Unable to overcome the sting of defeat, they murmured amongst themselves suggesting that they should capture Sita and make the two princes their prisoners. They even considered waging battle against King Janaka if he resisted. Wise kings in the assembly, however, advised them to desist from such vile thoughts. 266

Sita was sorely worried at the commotion and her maids quickly took her back to her mother. Rama watched her go and then calmly walked to sage Vishwamitra, unperturbed at the noise and threats being mooted around.

As the frustrated kings became more voluble in their threats, Lakshmana looked at them in fiery anger. His eyes became red and his eyebrows were arched in fury. His beautiful deer like eyes appeared as if they could hold a herd of wild elephants. The wicked kings cowed before his stern face but continued to murmur amongst themselves. Women of Janakpur looked on in breathless agony, terribly frightened at the disorder. 267

Suddenly the great Parashurama arrived in the assembly. As he strode forward amidst them, all the kings looked on in awe. His hair was piled on head and his face flushed in anger. His broad chest and muscular shoulders glistened with the strength of a warrior with a garland of beads around his neck, holding the skin of a deer, quiver at his side, bow in hand and a sharp axe on his shoulder, he looked the emblem of bravery.

Seeing his terrible form, the kings stood up one by one in hushed silence and bowed to him mentioning their names in low humble tones. If Parashurama as much as looked at one of them, he shuddered as if his end drew near. King Janaka came and bowed before Parashurama. He also called Sita and asked her to seek the sage's blessings.

Thereafter Vishwamitra came to Parashurama and introduced Rama and Lakshmana. The sage gave them his blessings but just at that moment he saw Shiva's bow lying on the ground broken in two bits. His anger knew no bounds as he blazed in fury: "O foolish king! Who has broken the bow?

Speak forth! For this rash act I shall overturn the earth within your kingdom".

The whole assembly shuddered with fear, while the wicked kings were pleased within their hearts. Rama saw Sita tremble with fear and, to allay her distress, he calmly spoke: "The one who has broken the bow is your devotee". 270

Hearing Rama, Parashurama was wild with anger. "A devotee performs acts of devotion! '' he thundered. "Whoever has broken this bow is my enemy! Let him stand aside, or else I shall destroy all the kings present here!''

Lakshmana could not tolerate the insult. He taunted the great Parashurama:

"When we broke bows in our young age,
Never O sage! you showed such rage!"

"Ah prince!'' fumed Parashurama, "surely you are drawn towards your end! Dare you compare the great bow of Shiva with an ordinary one?" 271

Lakshmana smiled as he coolly quipped:

"Listen sire!" Lakshmana lightly spake,
"All bows to be alike we take.
Of what use could an old bow be?
Rama thought it new, he went to see.

A touch broke it, can Rama be blamed,
Why without cause are you inflamed?"

Parashurama brandished his axe. "O ignorant boy!" he raged. "You know not my nature. I spare you only because you are a child! O fool! you take me to be only a saint? Fierce is my rage and famed am I as a foe of Kshattriyas. Many times have I humbled Kshattriya kings in the world. Behold O prince! the axe that slayed Sahasrabahu!

O king's young son! beware your speech, make not parents forlorn!
The terror of my deadly axe, kills babes in wombs unborn." 272

Lakshmana said softly, much amused,
"The sage with might's pride is infused!
With his sharp axe he me does threat,
Seeking to blow hill by his breath!

I'm not like tender blossom built,
Which finger's touch would cause to wilt!
With axe, bow arrows, armed you came,
I spoke words which are my clan's claim.

You're Brahmin born, wear holy thread,
I calmly heard what you had said.
To Brahmins, gods, devotees, cows,
In spite of might, our clan still bows.

To win is shame, to lose defeat,
So though you curse, I bow to feet.
Your words alone are sharp as steel,
Bow, arrow, axe you need not wield!

O sage forgive such words of mine which seeing your armour I have said!"
Hearing him Parashurama spoke aloud his wrathfilled body glowing red:

"Listen O Vishwamitra! If you want to save this boy, apprise him of my power, strength and fiery anger. I declare solemnly in this assembly: I shall hand this boy to Death if he dares me any more."

Tempestuous Lakshmana continued to incite Parashurama:

Said Lakshmana: "Of your power great,
You present, who else can relate!
Your deeds in your voice proudly raised,
You have oft told in many ways.

If yet unsaid, more let us hear!
Hold not your wrath, your mind do clear.
You're calm, fret not, valour's cause preach,
It suits you not ill words to speak!

Of their valour the brave give proof, by talking seek not to be known,
Before the foe they come to fight, of strength keep not boasting alone! 274

To Death you merely call repeat,
To come life out of me to beat!"

Parashurama gripped his axe firmly. "Let none of you blame me now," he roared. "This impudent boy deserves to be slain!"

Sage Vishwamitra then tried to pacify Parashurama. "Forgive the boy his mistake O great Rishi!" he said, "Saints take not offence at children's faults."

Vishwamitra smiled within his heart: Victory obsesses sage,
The power of Rama 'fore might of axe hidden remains in rage!' 275

"Sharp is my axe," spoke Parashurama quickly, "great is my wrath which this unabashed opposer of my guru faces as he impudently stands before me. It is only out of consideration for you that I do not slay him O Vishwamitra".

As Lakshmana heard Parashurama's hot words, he could not restrain himself; and address him thus:

"Who does not know your virtue's fame,
Known in the whole world is your name!
You have paid well your parent's debt,
But guru's favours weigh you yet!

These through me you seek now to pay,
But debt increases day by day.
Let some one work it out I pray,
I'll gladly give what he does say! "

Hearing Lakshmana's rude words, Parashurama boiled with rage and held his axe firmly. The whole assembly was aghast and criticised Lakshmana for his uncalled remarks. But Lakshmana himself was now moved with wrath. "O great amongst the Bhrigu's" he said firmly, "you threaten me with your axe again. Know that I hold myself because you are a Brahmin. Brave warriors you have yet to meet! You are great in your home O reverend Brahmin!"

The whole assembly broke out in disapproval of Lakshmana's words. Rama then motioned Lakshmana to restrain himself and to take his seat. Rama saw the rising flames of Parashurama's anger, fed by Lakshmana's irrepressible banter. The gentle Rama then spoke softly to pacify Parashurama: 276

"O Lord! take mercy on the boy,
Let not a child's words you annoy.
If he had known power of your might,
Could he have dared to show you slight?

A child if e'en of mischief seized,
Guru and parents yet are pleased.
Grant mercy for his tender age,
O gentle, learned, august sage! "

Rama's gentle words pacified the tempestuous sage to some measure. But just then buoyant Lakshmana whispered something and smiled laconically. Parashurama was beset with rage. "O Rama! '' he shouted, "your brother is a sinner! Fair in complexion, he is black in his heart! He is not gentle like you and fathoms not my immense power which can bring about his destruction !"

Lakshmana, irrepressible as ever, spoke to him again:
"Of sin anger is root O sage! '' Lakshmana did smiling lightly say,
"Due to which evil deeds men do, opposing all their actions sway. 277

Your servant sir! O kingly sage!
Now abjure wrath and mercy take!
Anger will broken bow not mend,
Pray sit, standing to tire does tend!

If love for bow does make you cross.
Let some one skilled restore the loss".

King Janaka was aghast at Lakshmana's impudent words. "Restrain yourself please!'' he told him, "It is not good to speak undesirable words." The people of Janakpur trembled while Parashurama raged with fury. As if to oblige Rama, the wrathful sage spoke. "I spare him because he is your younger brother. Handsome though he is, his mind is evil, like a golden pitcher full of poison."

Lakshmana smiled again as he heard Parashurama. The Gracious Rama then motioned him with eyes to desist. Lakshmana became calm and silently walked away to sit near sage Vishwamitra. 278

Rama then addressed the sage again:

Folding his hands, sage to beseech,
Rama gently spoke, soft winning speech:
"Listen O lord! O learned sage!
Mind not his words of tender age.

Nature of bees, children is same,
For their acts men do not them blame.
This folly Lakshmana has not done,
To suffer I should be the one.

So wrath or mercy, bond or death,
On thy devotee shall be met.
O king of sages, pray now speak,
What will calm thee, to do I'll seek."

But Parashurama would not appeased. "O Rama!'' he said, "how can my wrath be assuaged. Wicked indeed is your young brother and my axe has fallen not upon him. The deeds of my axe are so terrible that wives of brave kings drop babes from their wombs when they hear of them; yet I see this impudent boy alive before me! My mercy alone makes me see inaction of my axe!'' 279

The ebullient Lakshmana, though keeping his head bowed, could not help bantering:

"Your mercy's breeze is like your fame,
When you speak, blossoms seem to rain!

When mercy makes your body burn,
God save it when to wrath you turn! "

"O Janaka!'' fumed Parashurama, hearing Lakshmana's scornful words, this ignorant boy now seeks the jaws of death. Remove him from my sight! "

Lakshmana was Lakshmana, and quick came his sally:

Said Lakshmana smiling 'twixt his lips,
"Close eyes and lo! no one exists!"

In seething anger, Parashurama turned towards Rama. "O Rama! you have broken Shiva's bow and now seek to teach me learning! It is with your consent that your brother speaks rudely to me while you seek to appease me! Leave guile now and take arms with me or forsake your name of Rama! You are indeed the enemy of Shiva!"

Rama smiled within himself and bowed before the sage:

'I'm blamed for Lakshmana's words' Rama thought
'Oft is good nature with pain fraught.
The crafty ones, none seeks to fight,
Rahu leaves crescent moon in flight! '

"Sage abjure anger" Rama then said,
"You hold the axe, I bow my head.
Do what your anger may subdue,
I'll answer not, respecting you.

No strife 'twixt master devotee, O Brahmin great can there e're be,
He spoke seeing you as warrior dressed, 'twas not his fault he could not see. 281

Seeing your great axe, arrows and bow,
Some wrath indeed the boy did show,
He knew you not though knew your name,
So spoke words as are his birth's claim.

If you had come dressed as a sage,
Dust of your feet on head he'd place.
Forgive him what he did not know,
Mercy a Brahmins heart should show.

Lord with you how can I compare?
Towards the head how feet can dare?
Small is the name with which I fare,
Might of the axe your name does bear!

Strength of my bow is only mine,
O sage you have all virtues nine!
You are my senior in each way,
Pardon my faults O sage, I pray! "

Thus did Rama address Parashurama with deepest reverence. But he was inflamed with anger hearing himself being addressed as Brahmin and sage for he fancied himself more of a warrior. "O Rama", he shouted, "you are indeed as crooked as your brother. You take me to be only a Brahmin! You have broken Shiva's bow and have hence become haughty with pride, as if you have vanquished the world!"

Rama almost despaired of being able to appease Parashurama. He then spoke more firmly.

"Consider well what you say sage,
For my mistake great is your rage.
I touched the bow, it broke in twain,
'T was no great feat of which I'm vain.

O Bhrigu's lord of Brahmin race, no slight at all we meant to thee,
But can you name a warrior brave from whom of fear we'd seek to flee? 283

'Mongst warriors, gods, daityas or kings,
'Mongst mightiest if one challenge brings,
We shall not hesitate to fight,
E'en Death Itself if it seeks strife.

One Kshattriya born, who turns his face
From battle, brings to clan disgrace.
I speak from nature not from pride,
From Death Raghu's clan does not hide.

Your Brahmin clan such power bears,
Earning your grace one fearless fares."

On hearing this calm and profound speech of Rama, truth dawned upon the great sage:

Parashurama knew truth as he heard
From Rama these gentle ominous words.

Said he: "O Rama! now take this bow,
Pull bowstring so my doubts may go",
As Rama took bow, the arrow flew,
Parashurama then the Lord's might knew.

As Rama's great might was known to him, he glowed with love devotion deep,
His heart could contain not its joy, with folded hands he thus did speak: 284

"O Sun of Raghu's lotus clan!
O fire which demons' woods does fan!
O friend of gods and sages hail!
Saviour of doubts, attachments hail!
Ocean of Mercy! prayer hail!
Of art of speech and words Lord hail!
Who grants peace to devotees, hail!
O Beauteous One! Hail to Thee! Hail!

In what words may I pray to Thee!
O Swan of Shiva's Lake, hail to Thee!
Dark was my mind, I could not see,
O Lord of Mercy, pardon me!
Hail! Hail! Banner of Raghu's race!"
Sung Parashurama as he left the place.

Thus repeating as he went: "Glory! Glory! Glory to the mighty Rama, Bhrigu's Lord Parashurama left for the woods. The wicked kings, who had been murmuring against Rama's victory before Parashurama had entered the assembly, now trembled with fear. Slowly and silently they left the assembly one by one.

Tunes of celestial music filled the air. The gods showered flowers from the heavens. The people of Janakpur were filled with joy and bevies of beautiful and bright eyed maidens started singing songs of exquisite melody in voices sweet as nightingales. 285

Never, indeed, had such rejoicings been witnessed in Janakapur.

7. THE DIVINE MARRIAGE[1]

King Janaka was delighted that all had ended happily. He bowed respectfully to sage Vishwamitra and requested him to give further instructions regarding solemnisation of Sita's marriage. The sage advised him to send his messengers to King Dashratha and then perform the marriage according to the usual rites. 286

Janaka hastened to send messengers and thereafter called his merchants and artisans and directed them to decorate the town as it had never been adorned before and to prepare pavilions for the marriage.

[1] The story of Sita's marriage is abridged. The detailed version of the marriage is contained in 'Janaki Mangala', appearing in volume VI of this work.

The work started forthwith and decorations were lavish. Leaves were formed out of emeralds and flowers were shaped from rubies. The marriage canopy was decorated with such beauty that Brahma forgot his own kingdom. 287

Mango tree leaves were carved out of sapphires. Flowers of mango fruits were fashioned in gold and bunches of small mangoes were made from emeralds and hung with silken threads. 288

Even Shesha and Saraswati cannot describe the beauty of the town in which Lakshmi herself assumed the forms of its women. 289

Meanwhile Janaka's messengers reached Ayodhya. Reaching the palace gates, they had themselves announced. King Dashratha called them in audience immediately and they delivered the letter they had brought from King Janaka. As Dashratha read the letter his eyes were filled with tears of joy. He read the letter out to his court and then made enquiries about the welfare of Rama and Lakshmana. The messengers acquainted the king with all that had happened at Janakpur. ''Hearken O king amongst kings,'' they exclaimed, ''none is blessed like you having sons like Rama and Lakshmana. They are an adornment to the world!" 291

Dashratha then arose from his court and hastened to sage Vashist and handed over the letter and requested advice. He also summoned the messengers from Janakpur to acquaint the sage with the happenings in Janakpur. After reading the letter and hearing the messengers Vashist said: "For a righteous man, the world is full of happiness. As rivers flow incessantly into an ocean even though the ocean craves not for their waters, so also peace and prosperity comes unsolicited to a virtuous man. Both you and Kaushilya are engrossed in dharma. You have no equal for piety in the world: either now, or in the past nor will there be one like you in the future. Who in the world indeed, can be blest as you who have a son like Rama! Welfare is yours O king in all times. Prepare therefore without hesitation for the wedding". 294

The king then went to the palace of the queens to acquaint them with the happy tidings. Great were the rejoicings in the royal family on receiving the news.

The people of Ayodhya were overjoyed. The city smothered with silken flags, banners, homes were decorated with golden jars and festoons of netted pearls, and young married women of dazzling beauty adorned themselves in resplendent finery.

Which poet can describe the beauty of Dashratha's palace in which the Supreme Lord Rama had taken birth!

When all preparations were ready, the marriage party started for Janakpur. King Janaka had arranged for all rivers on the way to be bridged.

Rest houses had been constructed at various places which vied in beauty and comforts with the city of heaven.

No words can fathom the depth of Sita's pure love. As the wedding party entered the city she called upon the eight siddhis within her heart. Obedient to her command, they hastened to the reception hall and provided every known kind of luxury and comfort, joy and delight, for the royal guests. None except Rama knew the source of such an overwhelming welcome. He alone knew the deep love of his earthly consort. 306

The auspicious time was soon at hand and the marriage procession started. Gods rained flowers and celestial music filled the air. Shiva, Brahma and the hosts of heavenly gods, mounted their steeds to witness the Divine Marriage. Even the gods were amazed to see the marvellous decorations and sumptuous arrangements.

"Be not astonished", Shiva said calmly, "reflect upon the celestial grandeur of this Divine occasion! It is the marriage of Sita, the Earth's daughter with Raghuvira, the mere mention of whose name destroys all that is evil on the earth!" 314

The marriage procession moved on. In its midst, the four dazzling sons of Dashratha shone like the four beatitudes. Tears of rapture filled eyes of those who beheld graceful Rama. His body dazzled like a peacock's neck; his bright raiment outshone lightning; his face more lustrous than a cloudless autumn moon; his eyes more charming than the lotus.

As the procession arrived at the palace gates a bevy of loveliest women proceeded to perform the arati ceremony to welcome the bridegroom. They walked sinuously with the gait of dancers, their bangles, waist and ankle bells tinkling softly in delightful music. Their fawn-like eyes and multicoloured dresses put to shame the goddess of love, and their melodious song of welcome was sweeter than the cuckoo's song. Who can relate the joy of Queen Sunaina, the happy mother of Sita, the bride? She performed the arati as five kinds of music played softly on the occasion. Thereafter Rama proceeded to the marriage pavilion, where he was seated on a lustrous throne. The gods themselves had never witnessed so glorious a sight! "Since Brahma created the world" they said, "we have witnessed many marriages; but none so splendid and so well matched at this!" 317, 318

The auspicious moment had arrived. Vashist requested Shatananda for the bride to be brought to the marriage pavilion. As word reached them, most lovely maidens in the first bloom of youth, took her gently towards the pavilion. To the music of their wrist and ankle bells, they sang so melodiously that Kamadeva's cuckoos would blush with envy.

And Sita! What words can describe her divine beauty. She came slowly and hesitantly amidst her maids like Bliss Itself amidst the Graces. All

who saw her greeted her silently within their hearts. The gods too bowed and respectfully showered flowers upon her. Thus Sita arrived in the pavilion and amidst chanting of hymns she was conducted to her golden throne. 322

In that brief and glorious moment Rama and Sita beheld each other with eyes full of divine love.

Then the solemn moment of giving away the bride was at hand. Queen Sunaina was summoned by the chief priests and the queen sat in resplendent glory on the left of King Janaka. The priests chanted hymns from the Vedas, gods showered flowers from the heavens. The king and queen, lost in deepest love, performed the ceremony:

In highest bliss and deepest love the King and Queen washed Rama's feet,
Songs and sweet music filled the air in joy people stood up to greet.
The Feet enshrined in Shivaji's heart, the enemy of Kamadeva's lure,
The Feet of which one moment's thought banishes sins and makes us pure.
The Feet Ahalya touched and lived, her sins atoned, devotion blessed.
The Feet from which Ganga comes forth, which Shiva holds upon his head!
The Feet gods call Purest of Pure, which yogis worship moksha to get,
Those Feet while greetings filled the air, Kings Janaka washed in joy beset!
The family priest placed Sita's hands upon the palms of Rama's hands,
They poured water uniting them, blessed by sages from many lands.
The radiant beauty of the Lord the king and queen beheld enthralled,
They gave away the bride to Rama, the sacred rites with joy performed.
Like Ocean gave Lakshmi to Vishnu, Himwant gave Parvati to Shiva,
To bring peace to the Universe, Sita to Rama Janaka did give.
As Janaka watched with deep devotion fulfilment of his desire.
With lapels knotted Rama and Sita took rounds of the holy fire.
Hearing the songs of greetings, prayers and rejoicings, in the air,
The gods were pleased and showering flowers blessed the dazzling divine pair. 324

Around the fire the couple walked,
With deep devotion people watched.
The charming prince and lovely bride,
Glorious, blissful, dazzling bright!

From jewels studded in each wall,
Their sweet reflections filled the hall.
As if Kamadeva Rati stood there,
Watching the dazzling Divine Pair!

From walls and ceilings, every side,
Love's god and goddess blessed the bride.
Those present in devotion watched,
Like Janaka were in themselves lost!

Rounds done, they bowed with closed eyes,
Thus was Rama's marriage solemnized.
He put vermilion midst her curls,
That moment touching beyond words!

Like lotus pollen, held by snake,
Given when moon would nectar take!
Then sage Vashist blessed Rama and bride.
Sitting resplendent side by side!

Seeing Rama and Sita on their thrones, Dashratha was filled with immense joy,
He was delighted seeing the bride, so glamorous lovely and so coy,
"The Lord is wed! '' the people said, with joy pervading in their hearts,
The peace and glory of that day, words known to poets cannot impart.
Then Vashist asked Janaka to wed the other lovely maidens three,
Mandvi, Urmila, Shrutkirti, damsels renowned for their beauty.
Kushadhwaj's eldest daughter Mandavi, accomplished and dazzling bright,
Was chosen to wed prince Bharat, the king performed the wedding rites.
Sita's sweet sister Urmila, graceful and beauty incarnate,
The king married to Lakshmana, the rites with joy did celebrated.
The lovely fawn eyed Srutikirti, bashful damsel of graceful limbs,
Was wed to handsome Satrughna: all stood the four couples to glimpse.
The shy and dazzling couples four, of matching beauty and of grace,
Were hailed by gods with fragrant blooms as they gazed on each others face.
Like jiva's four aspects in four states, looked newly weds all in a row.
World consciousness; glory and dream; wisdom sleep; Brahma and Bliss's glow!
Dashratha was proud of his four sons and four brides they had wed,
As if four actions he had earned and to four fruits been led. 325

After the weddings of Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna had also been performed with great rejoicings, Janaka addressed Dashratha with his voice choked in deep emotion: "O king!", he said, "blessed indeed are we to have been favoured with alliances in your noble family. All that is in our realm together with our own services we lay at you behest. Forgive the shortcomings of our daughters, O gracious king, and bestow upon

them your exalted grace. They shall serve you as your humble handmaidens."

The Glory of the Solar Dynasty replied befittingly to the great king of Mithila's courteous words and thanked him effusively for the comforts of his lavish hospitality.

The nuptials were over and as sweet music played softly, Dashratha with others of the marriage party returned to rest in the palaces. Meanwhile the priests permitted young maidens to escort the brides and bridegrooms to the 'kohavara' to beseech blessing of Gauri and thereafter to conduct the ceremony of mirthful pleasantries which was so eagerly awaited by ladies and friends of the bride:

As lovely Sita glanced at Rama, she blushed but felt not shy in heart,
Her lotus eyes thirsted for love, like fish towards cool waters dart. 326

Handsome by nature, sky blue frame,
Millions of Kamadevas put to shame.
Lotus Feet charming saints like bees,
Dyed red in patterns heart to please.

His shimmering and pure yellow dress,
Did sun and light of dawn suppress.
Bells tinkled sweetly in wrist band,
Gems set in gold adorned his hand.

His sacred thread lay dazzling bright,
The ring he wore charmed every sight.
In nuptial glory he was dressed,
Garlands and gems adorned his breast.

A yellow stolle o'er shoulders lay,
Woven with pearls, gems glittering gay.
Eyes like lotus; in ears rings wore,
His face, it seemed, all treasure bore.

Charming his nose, sweet eyebrows arched,
Enchanting forehead tilak marked!
The marriage crown he wore with grace.
'Midst pearls and gems dazzled his face.

Rare jewels stringed in lovely crown, all limbs bewitching to the eye,
All pretty damsels of the town, beheld the bridegroom with a sigh!
Presenting jewels gems and clothes, they hailed him with the holy flame,
Gods sent blossoms from heavens above, from every side sweet blessings came.

The wedded pairs to kohavara then the ladies brought filled with delight,
In deepest love singing sweet songs they went through all the usual rites,
By Saraswati and Parvati helped, each from the other took a sweet,
In mirthful sallies all absorbed, beholding them life's fruit they reaped.
But Sita gazed upon her lord's reflection in her jewelled wrist,
Daring to move not graceful arm lest bangles shook to break loves tryst.

After the ceremonies were over the brides and bridegrooms were escorted to the palace in which Dashratha and the guests from Ayodhya were staying. As they arrived, wishes and blessings for a long life were showered on each of the four happy couples. 327

Next day King Janaka held a banquet. The guest made the five oblations and sat to the delightful feast. As the banquet proceed, the songs of the ladies became merrier in their jests and the whole assembly was moved with laughter at the revellery of the festive hour. 328

Dashratha spent many days as the guest of King Janaka. Whenever he sought leave of the king to return to Ayodhya, he was affectionately detained. The news was conveyed that the marriage party would now return filled the queens with grief. They clasped Sita to their bosom and blessing her said: "May you ever be loved by your husband, and may both of you have a long and happy married life! Be obedient to your new father and mother and guru, and bear in mind the inclination of your husband in whatever you do." Similar advice was given to the other brides and the queens clasped all four of them to their bosoms again and again. 332

The auspicious time for departure was now at hand. The four bridegrooms came to the royal palace to bid farewell. Softly and gently Rama spoke to mother Sunaina: "The king is desirous of starting for Avadh and has sent us to take leave of you. O mother! be pleased to give me your commands and regard me for ever with affection as your own child". 334

Tears flowed from the eyes of the queen at the thought of separation from her darling child. With an effort she clasped Sita to her heart and led her towards Rama. "Ah my son", she exclaimed, "I bless you! O All knowing One! You know the thoughts which surge within all human hearts. To our family, the people of our kingdom; to the king and to me Sita is as dear as our hearts. O Rama! tender is my darling child! consider, I beseech you, her love and accept her as your handmaiden! O fulfilment of all desires and action! Wisest of the wise! O Lover of love! O Gracious Rama! Container of qualities of saints! Destroyer of vice! Abode of Mercy! I hail thee and make over to thee this daughter of mine who is the pride of my heart." 336

The queen clasped Rama's holy feet and wept unconsolably. All stood afflicted with the grief of parting. 337

Meanwhile King Janaka arrived to bid farewell to the brides and bridegrooms. Seeing Sita, his eyes brimmed with tears. Calmness left the great king even though he was renowned as the emblem of ascetism. He clasped Sita to his heart and emotional bonds of deep love prevailed over calm detachment of his profound learning. Janaka controlled his emotions with courage and with great affection explained the dharma of woman-kind and of family customs to his beloved daughter.

The hour of departure arrived. Gods showered flowers from heavens and nymphs sang to tunes of celestial music. King Janaka accompanied his royal guests and it was with difficulty that the king of Koshala could prevail upon his affectionate host to return to his home. At last the two kings exchanged courteous greetings and King Janaka turned to bid farewell to his sons-in-law and daughters. 340

He clasped Rama's lotus hands in his own and, over-whelmed with emotion, softly addressed words which seemed to have been born of love:

"Leave from thee Rama how may I take?
Swan of sages and Shiva's mind's lake!
For Thee yogis in yoga abide,
Renouncing anger, greed and pride.

All knowing, pervading, Brahma, Supreme,
Immortal; qualities none, yet seem!
Thou art unknown by word or speech,
By Faith not reason art Thou reached.

Whose glory Vedas proclaim: 'not this!'
In three worlds who bears constant bliss,
The glorious Rama, Cause of all Peace, I see before my eyes,
When God upon one grants His Grace, fortune towards him smiles!" 341

"You have honoured me O Rama," continued Janaka, "and have made me your own. Even if ten thousand Saraswatis and Sheshas narrate your qualities and my great fortune for millions of kalpas, they cannot completely describe them.

Knowing this, even a little devotion pleases you and great is my fortune!

I beseech you Rama, grant me eternal devotion of your lotus feet!"

King Janaka then returned to Mithila after taking leave of Dashratha, Lakshmana, Bharat, and Shatrughan and paying his respects to sage Vashist and Vishwamitra. The marriage party reached Ayodhya after many halts in beautiful places en route. The city was lavishly decorated

and a tumultous ovation greeted the return of the four royal princes with their beautiful brides. 346

Thus ends Bala Kanda
(The Book of Childhood)
The first book of
Ramacharitmanasa
which destroys all sins of Kaliyuga.

BOOK TWO

AYODHYA KANDA

(The Book of Ayodhya)

Parvati in arms, Ganga on head, Moon's crescent adorning his forehead,
With deadly poison held in throat, the king of snakes upon his chest.
That Peerless god, ashes anointed, destroyer, redeemer, all pervading,
May that saviour of moon-like radiance, Lord Shankara always protect me. 1 Sl

Wrought not with joy at kingdom's charm, nor moved by news of banishment,
May my actions be blessed by Him, Lord God of peaceful contentment, 2 Sl

Like blue lotus His sky-blue form, of graceful limbs, Sita by side,
With bow and arrows in His hands, Lord Rama I hail! in Him abide. 3 Sl

I clean the mirror of my mind with dust of guru's feet,
Bestower of four fruits of life, I sing Rama's Glorious Deeds.

1. DASHRATHA DECIDES TO INSTALL RAMA AS CROWN PRINCE

Great happiness and prosperity prevailed in Ayodhya when Dashratha returned to his kingdom with his four sons and their beautiful wives. 1

King Dashratha was exceedingly pleased with the qualities, grace and nature of Rama. The people of Ayodhya also adored their gentle, glamorous prince and prayed to Mahesha to prompt King Dashratha to install Rama as Crown Prince of Ayodhya in his own lifetime.

One day, as King Dashratha sat on his throne in court amidst his ministers, he saw the reflection of his face in the glittering jewels studded in the hall. He noticed that his hair about his temples were turning grey. 'I am getting old now' he thought to himself. After a while he went to see sage Vashist. He paid him customary honour and thanked him for the sound advice and guidance he had given him throughout his reign. "O great sage", said Dashratha, "I have now this request. Rama is now thoroughly accomplished in regal ways. All our people and ministers and people regard Rama with the same affection as they have for me". 2

Then Dashratha appealed to Vashist, "I request you, august sage, to advise me, I wish to install Rama as Crown Prince of our kingdom". 3

Vashist praised the king for the wisdom with which he had ruled the kingdom. Thereafter he spoke, "Rama, O king, is holy and compassionate. Those who oppose him have to regret their actions. Blessed indeed are you to have a son like him. Prepare for his coronation without delay. " "All times and days are auspicious for paying obeisance to Rama", the sage added exultantly. 4

King Dashratha was delighted. He summoned Sumantra, his chief minister, along with other ministers of his court and acquainted them of his resolve. They also welcomed their king's decision and fully endorsed the crowning of Rama. The king thereupon asked the chief minister to make necessary arrangements in consultation with sage Vashist. 5

The news of Rama's coronation was received with great jubilation throughout the kingdom. The people were overjoyed and enthusiastically started decorating the entire city of Ayodhya. Mother Kaushilya blessed her son in her heart and gave charities in token of her pleasure. When all preparations were complete, Dashratha requested sage Vashist to convey the news formally to Rama, initiate him into the customs of royalty, and to direct him to observe the fast and perform the required prayers prior to coronation: 6, 7

The people welcoming the news, their future Crown Prince praised,
Thanking God for His Divine Grace, voice in rejoicing raised. 8

Dashratha the sage to Rama then sent,
To guide the prince for the event.
When told that Vashist came to meet,
Rama quickly rose bowing to his feet.

With deep regard he brought the sage,
All sixteen forms of honour paid.
Escorting him to his own seat,
With folded hands Rama thus did speak:

"Guru's advent in pupil's house,
Is honour deep of which he's proud.
Yet you need only send for me,
To do your wish as it should be.

But Sire, custom you've set aside,
By coming our house purified.
Tell me sage what is thy behest,
Till it is done I shall not rest."

Pleased with Rama's words of devotion, Vashist then to him thus spake:
"Rama thy words become thy nature, faith its strength from thee does take." 9

When he had thus Rama's nature praised,
To him with pleasure spoke the sage:
"To make you Crown Prince king desires,
Prepare now as custom requires.

In prayer and fasting spend the day,
For God's blessing in reverence pray."
The sage then went back to the king,
The news sad thoughts to Rama did bring.

"We were companions night and day,
All four of us in work and play.
Together lessons, scriptures read,
Our nuptial vows together said.

Now common life does us forsake,
The eldest must crown's burden take."

While the gracious Rama was thus lost in thought, Lakshmana came to him and Rama greeted his brother lovingly. Bharat was away on a visit to his mother's home and they eagerly awaited his return on the happy occasion. 10

Strangely however, like thieves shunning a bright moonlit night, the gods were dismayed at the rejoicings. They were filled with misgivings that the people of Ayodhya would not allow their new beloved king to champion their cause and redeem their woes by vanquishing the demons. The gentle hearted Rama would not go against the wishes of his people.

The gods then appealed to Saraswati: "Goddess!" they said, "perceive our woes and so contrive that Rama may renounce his kingdom and go to the forests to accomplish our work." 11

Destiny took a turn in favour of the gods.

2. QUEEN KAIKEYI'S PLOT

While the people of Ayodhya were busy putting final touches to decorations to celebrate the coronation of Rama on the following day, Manthra a hunch backed maid of queen Kaikeyi, envious that Rama, son of queen Kaushilya, would be crowned king plotted against the Coronation. Bharat, son of queen Kaikeyi must be installed Crown Prince instead.

She went to Kaikeyi, weeping and sulking before her, till her indulgent mistress asked her "What ails thee?"

The crafty maid gave no answer but drew a deep sigh and wept unceasingly.

"Ah!" said the queen smilingly tolerantly, "it appears that you have annoyed dear Lakshmana again and he has given you a lesson for your impudence!"

Still the wicked handmaiden spoke not a word and only breathed deeply like a venomous serpent.

Kaikeyi was now worried and she nervously exclaimed:

"O why do you not speak? Is Rama, the king, Lakshmana or Satrughan not well?"

"O queen", she then said, still sulking and crying, "only Rama has welfare in his lot today as he is to be installed Crown Prince. God is indeed pleased only on Kaushilya! Why do you not go yourself and see her glory which causes me so much pain?"

Hearing her flattering evil speech;
In anger Kaikeyi thus did speak:
"Be quiet! of discord do not talk,
Or else thy tongue shall be cut off."

The one-eyed, lame and hunchbacked, all these are known for wile,
More so 'mongst these a maidservant, thus Kaikeyi thought and smiled.14

Said Kaikeyi: "Manthra I declare,
No ill will to you do I bear.
Blissful indeed will be the day,
When Rama is Crown Prince as you say.

Younger 'mongst brothers elder serves,
Raghu's clan does not from this swerve.
If Rama's crowning the morrow sees,
Ask of me what your heart doth please.

For Rama of gentle nature is,
Alike for him each mother his.
In faith, 'mongst all he likes me best,
Of this I'm sure, I've put to test.

Another birth if God does grant,
A son like Rama I would most want.
Rama is as dear to me as life,
Why are you then so lost in strife?"

"Swear to me in the name of Bharat", continued Kaikeyi, "and tell me what makes you fret in this hour of joy?"

"Patiently indeed you heard me when I last spoke!" sneered Manthra

bitterly, "and considerate indeed were the thanks I got! Now I will speak to you only when I have arranged for another tongue!" 15

Manthra's stubborn refusal to talk and her crafty sulking intrigued the queen and she implored Manthra again and again to acquaint her with the reason of her grief. 16

Gradually Manthra fabricated a web of dire consequences for her if Kaushilya became Queen Mother. She would, Manthara warned, treat her as a slave to do her bidding.

Now Kaikeyi was the favourite queen of King Dashratha, and she was distressed at the possibility of being humiliated by Kaushilya and losing the favours of the king after Rama had been installed Crown Prince. Influenced thus, she begged of her crafty maid that she be advised to have Bharat crowned instead:

Kaikeyi was lured, misled by Fate,
Implored by her, Manthra thus spake:
"Why do you ask what you should know,
Even a beast knows friend or foe.

For fourteen days the king has schemed,
He seals your fate while you have dreamed!
My clothes and food too you I owe,
True words I speak which you should know.

If I delude you with false things,
May God destroy me for my sins.
If Rama tomorrow throne ascends,
Your days of glory soon shall end.

I tell you truly pray heed take,
Like fly in milk will be your state.
If with your son you serve not Rama,
All shall contrive to do you harm.

As Kadru caused Vinita sorrow, Kaushilya will bring you grief,
Bharat will be thrown in prison, Lakshmana will be Rama's chief." 19

Kaikeyi paled with Manthra's speech,
Words failed her and she could not speak.
She trembled like a plantain tree,
While Manthra looked on callously.

Of many tales with wiles she spoke,
In Kaikeyi's breast deep guile awoke.
Seeing love in clique, Kaikeyi's ruin loomed,
She praised Manthra, by her wiles doomed.

"Manthra your fears are true!" she said,
"My flickering right eye warns distress!
Vile dreams come haunting me at night,
I spoke not yet, knowing not my plight.

Dear friend! I have a simple mind,
I know not wiles of any kind.

Never have I hurt anyone, nor done to one a harmful turn,
Alas I know not how I've sinned, for which God wants my life to burn. 20

I'll sooner dwell at father's place,
Than in Ayodhya see disgrace.
Rather than live with one's own foe,
Life's pleasures sweet one may forego.

Thus full of woe she sighed and wept,
Her crafty net then Manthra swept:
"Why need your days be spent in sorrow,
When joy can be yours on the morrow?

Those who to make you fret conspire,
Shall face the fate that they desire!
Since they have plotted for your rights,
Bleak are my days, sleepless my nights.

I've met astrologers of renown,
Who say Bharat shall wear the crown!
O queen I'll tell you how to win
Prize of your deep love for the king."

"Help me O Manthra" wailed Kaikeyi, "whatever you say shall be done,
On your advice friend in my sorrow, I will leave husband and son". 21

While thus she sought to save her lot,
Manthra's stone heart sharpened the plot.
The wretched queen saw not her doom,
On altar lamb sees not death loom.

Her evil plan in soft words dipped,
Like poison in sweet honey mixed.
Said Manthra: "Bring to mind dear queen,
Your help when king would dead have been.

The king two boons to you long owes,
Take them today and foil your foes.
To Bharat throne; to woods Rama sent
Kaushilya's joy for you be meant!

On Rama's name oath let king first take,
Excuses then he will not make.
If this night goes, nothing can mend,
Mark my words queen, I speak as friend."

In hate-filled words Manthra said: "Go to the weeping room dear queen,
All shall be done as you desire, but let not trust in king be keen!" 22

The wretched queen was caught in the snare laid by Manthra. Considering her dear to her heart, she complimented her on her wisdom. "None is my well-wisher like you in the whole world!" she exclaimed effusively. "You have saved me from drowning in the ocean of Disaster!"

3. RAMA IS BANISHED FOR FOURTEEN YEARS

Misled by Manthra's wicked plan, queen Kaikeyi entered the wailing room in her palace. The seed of calamity had been sown, and Manthra's words were like drops of rain on a sown but thirsty soil. Gathering about her tokens of resentment, she cast off her beautiful garments and ornament and dressed herself in coarse clothes, strewing her long and beautiful tresses all around her face in wild disorder.

Meanwhile joyous activity reached its peak in Ayodhya and the news of Rama's coronation brought many of his friends to him to offer their greetings. Rama received them affectionately: "Who is therein the world", they exclaimed amongst themselves on departing, "as kind and graceful as our Rama?" 23

The people of Ayodhya rejoiced but Kaikeyi burned within her heart. Who is not spoilt by bad company? No intelligence remains when one is influenced by bad counsel.

In the evening King Dashratha, full of pleasure in anticipation of the rejoicings on the morrow, went to Kaikeyi's palace. It was as if Love itself approached Obduracy. The king was aghast when he was told that the queen was in the wailing room. Sorely distressed, the king hastened thither and found her sprawled on the ground, her hair dishevelled and her ornaments strewn about her and her eyes turned dark in anger.

Dashratha pleaded with his favourite queen with love arising from the depth of his heart: "O my darling queen of beautiful face! O lovely one of fawn like eyes, of voice sweet as a kokil, O beauty of sinous limbs like those of a gazelle. What is the cause of your annoyance ? O love! What has dared to slight you ? Which king shall I destroy ? Even if a god has annoyed you, I shall not hesitate to kill him! " 25

"O lovely one!" pleaded the king, "I live like the chakor beholding the moon like radiance of your beautiful face! Darling one! my wealth and my

sons, my very heart itself, awaits your bidding. Ask of me whatever you will; I take an oath on Rama that it shall be yours!"

Hearing Dashratha take an oath on the name of Rama, Kaikeyi got up and smiled. She started wearing the ornaments that she had thrown about her. She pouted her lips charmingly at the king and said:

"My love you ask me what I want, but without giving make me live,
Even two boons you granted once, it seems you do not wish to give."
27

"O now I know," he smiled and said,
"Some fancy does my queen beset!
Had you asked for the boons I owe,
I'd never waver, this you know.

Don't blame me love for your mistake,
Not two but four boons you may take!
This tradition Raghu's clan ever lives by,
To honour words trothed e'en though we die.

Falsehood is worse than a heap of sins,
Millions of beads cannot make hills.
With roots in Truth can virtue grow,
Vedas, puranas, sages all say so.

On name of Rama I have taken oath,
Of my love and actions he is abode! "
Then spoke wicked Kaikeyi with cunning skill,
Like flighting an eagle towards its kill.

Dashratha's desires like birds in woods, sung lovingly to peace proclaim,
Kaikeyi's boon like bhilini's eagles, swooping to kill them with their aim.
28

"My dear the first boon that I beg.
Make Bharat Crown Prince throne to get.
The next with folded hands I ask;
Fulfil my love, wish of my heart:

For fourteen years in woods to live,
To Rama, as yogi, orders give!"

The kings's heart bled in sorry plight,
Like chakva pining in moonlight.
He stood like swooned and could not speak,
Like eagle swooped on partridge meek.

He grew pale and lifeless became,
Like lightning does a palm tree maim.
Eyes closed, head drooped, in anguish wrought,
Like Thought itself lost in thought.

'My life's desire would blossom soon,
Like elephant mad she crushed the bloom.
Alas! she ruins Ayodhya's name,
And sets foundation for its shame.

Trusting the woman I have erred, turned joy into deep grief,
Like saints upon salvation's verge, lose it by worldly greed.' 29

While anguish thus haunted the king,
Kaikeyi these taunting words did fling:
"Is Bharat not, O king your son?
Of queens am I no longer one?

If my boons arrow wounds have wrought,
Ere granting them you should have thought.
Grant me my boons, or tell me 'Nay',
You are Truth's emblem as you say.

Refuse your boons if you now want,
Go back on Truth and bear world's taunt!
You gave boons gladly, pledging Truth,
Hoping I'd seek barley forsooth!

Shibi, Bali, Dadhich kept pledges made,
Though heavy was the price they paid."
Her taunts the king in anguish bore,
Like salt put on a burning sore.

The king slowly opened his eyes, he knew dharma's duty on him was.
Holding his forehead in pain sighed, knowing that he would be ruin's cause. 30

Seeing him Kaikeyi in anger blazed.
Like naked sword flashing its blade.
It's hilt: her mind: it's edge: dire vice,
Whetted on Manthra's cruel advice.

The sword's sharp edge as Dashratha saw,
He mused if it his life would draw.
Strengthening his heart he slowly spake,
Loving words Kaikeyi to placate:

"Such bitter words, love do not speak,
Against your gentle nature sweet.
Bharat and Rama are my two eyes,
Shiva knows my heart that bears no lies.

At dawn I shall my men despatch,
Bharat and Satrughan to bring back.
Bharat Crown Prince I will declare,
Ayodhya's crown the prince shall wear.

Rama does not crave for kingdom's charm he loves dear Bharat without doubt,
The eldest son succeeds the throne, has been our royal custom throughout. 31

A hundred times on Rama I swear,
No advice did Kaushilya bear.
I asked you not, aye this is true,
And so perchance you anger shew.

Spare wrath and be in good clothes dressed,
Bharat shall soon to throne be blessed.
But one thing makes me ill at ease,
In second boon, love, relent please!

Its scorching heat still burns my heart,
Do you in sport or truly ask?
Allay your anger, make heart calm,
All say good and gentle is Rama.

You loved him, always praising him,
Was that false or is this a whim?
Rama is kind even to a foe,
How can he against his mother go?

My love leave jest and anger now, and ask for boon with a calm mind,
So that when Bharat wears the crown, my heart all joy and peace may find. 32

Love! without water fish may live,
Its need of *mani* snake may give.
But mark my true words, darling mine,
Without Rama I cannot bear life.

O my beloved queen think well,
In Rama's sweet form my life doth dwell.

Hearing the king, she livid became,
Like ghee kindles in fire a flame!"

She coldly said: "Try not your art,
Mere idle words melt not my heart.
Refuse, or else my boons now grant,
I care not for your wileful chant!

For you Rama is saintly and wise,
Rama's mother good; don't thoughts disguise.
Kaushilya planned to torture me,
She'll rue her folly, I shall see!

If by the morrow dressed as hermit, Rama does not to forest go,
Falsehood and sin of my death, rests on you king, this you should know!"
33

With these vicious words Kaikeyi stood up inflamed in anger, like the swirling waters of a terrible river of wrath, it was undermining the roots of the Solar tree and unconcernedly flowing towards the ocean of calamity.

Dashratha knew that the queen meant truly what she said, and that Death itself hovered over his head in the form of this woman. He pleaded to her again to refrain from becoming axe for the entire solar race. He offered his own life but begged her not to kill him by separation from Rama, cautioning her that if she persisted in her folly, flames of regret would engulf her heart for the rest of her life.

When Dashratha found that his words were of no avail, he helplessly wailed: "O Rama! O Rama! O Raghunath!" and collapsed upon the floor.
34

But determined and unrelenting queen persisted in taunting the distressed king like filling poison in a wound, "On what strength had you implored me to ask for boons if you were to act so unseemingly? O king, is it possible for both of these to be done at the same time; to jest and to mourn ? To be called charitable and yet be miser ? To wage a gallant battle yet shirk from injury ? Either forsake your trothed words or bear fortitude; do not wail like a woman and seek compassion. For one dedicated to Truth; body, wife, son, home, wealth and indeed all that there is in the world should be like a blade of straw."

Hearing Kaikeyi's painful purportful words, the king weakly exclaimed: "Say whatever you like! The fault is not yours. My own evil destiny ordains your demonical turn and bids you speak thus. Bharat seeks not crown even in dreams. Fate instills this evil counsel in your breast. But mark you queen! Renowned Ayodhya which you seek to destroy shall flourish again, and the grace of Rama, the abode of all good qualities, shall

abound therein. All brothers shall serve him, and his face shall dazzle in the three worlds. Only thy disgrace and my remorse shall never be effaced, even after our death. Do now what seemeth fit unto thee. As long as I live, I seek not to see thy face. Ah! unfortunate one! Repentance shall be thy lot in the end!" And in anguish the king cried, 'Rama! Rama!' and prayed: "May the sun never dawn upon Ayodhya to proclaim the evil hour of the Solar dynasty!" 36

4. RAMA LEARNS OF HIS BANISHMENT

Dawn came but the king had not risen. People had collected enthusiastically outside the palace gates for the coronation of Rama. Those within the palace were surprised to hear that the king had not left his bed chamber. Dashratha rose unfailingly before the last hours of darkness ended. They requested Sumentra to go within and see why the king had been delayed. 37

Sumentra walked into a deserted palace. The few persons he met were silent. He reached Kaikeyi's palace where he saw the king lying pale and inconsolate, like a lotus withering from its roots. Glibed Kaikeyi: "The king has not slept the night and has been asking for Rama. Go and tell the Prince that the king would see him." 38

Rama hastened to his beloved father. He was shocked to see him lying as if in a swoon. His lips were parched and his body burning in anguish. It was the first occasion in his life for Rama to face with grief. But he restrained his emotions and softly asked Kaikeyi: "What ails our father? Speak quickly mother so that his grief may be allayed." 39

Kaikeyi coldly told Rama that the king had granted her two boons and that she had asked for Bharat's crowning and Rama's banishment to the forests for fourteen years. "The king is disconsolate" she said, "torn between love and his words. Relieve his anguish, if you can, by fulfilling the words he has spoken." 40

Kaikeyi uttered these bitter words so remorselessly that even Remorse lost her composure. Her tongue was like a bow and her speech the arrows, piercing the king's tender heart. It was as if Cruelty itself was practising archery with these as instruments.

Rama smiled as he heard the queen calmly without distress:

Rama calmly Kaikeyi's message heard,
Then gently spoke in loving words;
Noble and beyond worldly reach,
Softly spoken, adorning speech:

"Mother blest is the son indeed,
Who parents words with joy does heed;

Who serves them just as they desire,
Such son to God's Bliss does aspire.

In forests I will sages meet, knowledge to myself bring,
This fortune is with blessings yours, and commands of the king. 41

Our Crown Prince will be Bharat mine,
In all things God to me is kind.
If to the woods I go not pleased,
With ignorance I would be seized.

Those seeking reeds, fruit tree forsake,
Spurn nectar, poison gladly take,
E'en they'd not miss a prize so golden,
O mother, to you I am beholden!

But one thing does my heart conflict,
What does our father so afflict?
How can this thing cause him to swoon?
What grieves him truly tell me soon."

Full of guile, Kaikeyi praised Rama for his concern for his father and the readiness with which he sought to fulfil the boons the king had granted. "I swear on Bharat," she exclaimed with a show of concern for the king, "there is no other reason for king's anguish. I bless you for carrying out the commands of the king to save him dishonour in his old age."

When king recovered, turning side, Rama's Name on lips he brought,
Saying 'Rama has come', minister asked what had king anguish wrought. 43

'Rama has come', when the king this heard,
He calmed his heart, eyes weakly stirred.
Gently Sumentra placed him on seat,
Dashratha saw Rama fall on his feet.

Then king clasped Rama in deep love bound,
As if a snake had *mani* found.
As Dashratha gazed upon Rama's face,
A stream of tears from his eyes raced.

So deep his grief, he could not speak,
To clasp him only he could seek.
He prayed to Brahma within his heart:
'Let not Rama to the woods depart!'

Then he implored Lord Shiva in mind,
'O Shiva eternal! hear prayer mine!

You're easily pleased, desires thou gifts,
I'm server Thine, my anguish lift!

As prompter Thou dwells in all minds, to Rama such wisdom give,
To set apart my love and words and in Ayodhya live. 44

Let me lose fame, in censure dwell,
Let me lose Heaven, burn in Hell;
Let me bear all anguish and woe,
But let not Rama from my sight go.'

Seeing the king in intense agony, Rama gently spoke to his beloved father: "Forgive me father, for seeking to calm you with words. Why are you so sad for this trifling matter?

Blessed is the son born on this earth who earns the pleasure of his father by the actions of his life. The son who has thus earned the blessings of his father has in his hands, the four fruits of life: wealth, dharma, actions and liberation.

Arise, O father on this auspicious occasion, and abjuring grief, give me leave to depart with a happy heart."

Thus saying Rama left to take blessings of mother Kaushilya. 45

The news of Rama's banishment spread quickly like wild fire in the entire kingdom of Ayodhya. People were stunned, everyone denounced Kaikeyi for her evil deed. None could understand what instigated Kaikeyi to seek Rama's banishment. Resigned in their hearts to the inexorable hand of Destiny they exclaimed: "What is there that fire cannot burn? What is there that cannot be contained in the ocean? What is there in the world that does not have an end? What is there in the world that a woman cannot accomplish?" 47

Some ventured to suggest that Bharat was involved in this tragic development. But others firmly asserted that Rama was dear to Bharat as his own heart.

The moon may shed sparks of fire and nectar may become poison, but Bharat will not oppose Rama even in dreams. 48

Elder ladies of the family and those in whom Kaikeyi had faith begged her to change her mind. "Consider, queen", they said, "will Sita dwell in Ayodhya without her lord Rama? Will Lakshmana abide without his ever constant companion and beloved Rama? Will Bharat accept the crown of Ayodhya in the absence of his respected Rama? Can the aged king remain alive for a moment without beholding the form of him beloved Rama?" 49

Rama does not hunger for the throne,
Shuns sense pleasures, dharma's flag has borne.
Ask king another boon to give,
Make Rama leave home, with guru live.

If what we say does not you please,
Mark! nothing in your hands you'll seize.
In caprice if your boons you chose,
Delay not now, your mind disclose.

Is son like Rama for forest meant?
What will men say knowing you have sent?
To find a way now quickly go,
To end this ill fame and dire woe.

They pleaded and reasoned with Kaikeyi, but the queen remained silent. 50

5. RAMA TAKES MOTHER KAUSHILYA'S PERMISSION TO GO TO THE FORESTS

Leaving Kaikeyi's palace, Rama hastened to mother Kaushilya to take her blessings before proceeding to the woods. His countenance glowed with peace and fourfold was the joy within his heart: 51

Before his mother, Gracious Rama
Stood bowed to feet, happy and calm.
Blessing him she her son embraced,
Of gems and dresses presents made.

She kissed his face with love instilled,
With tears of joy, sweet rapture filled.
Took him in lap, to bosom pressed,
In deepest love milk flowed from breast.

For her great joy words there are none,
Like Kuvera's wealth by beggar won.
Beholding his calm dazzling face,
She softly spoke these words of grace:

"Now let me know, I bless thee son,
When does that happy moment come;
Which sees fulfilment of my deeds,
To purpose of my birth which leads!"

"O Rama!" continued mother Kaushilya, oblivious of the tragic turn of Destiny, of which she saw no signs of grief on her son's face, "when does that auspicious moment come which men and women of Ayodhya await like the chatak and chataki wait for the autumn rain! " "O son! take your bath quickly now and present yourself to your father for the ceremony! All Ayodhya awaits thee! I bless thee son! "

Knowing well the call of dharma, Rama—Lord of Dharma itself, spoke softly to his mother:

"Mother dear, as king of forests father mine has bid me fare,
God has willed that I go thither, work perhaps awaits me there.
Mother mine, give me your blessings with a calm and happy heart,
Bid me farewell smiling mother, so that I may gladly start.
Do not hesitate to send me out of your deep love for me,
Mother, by your loving blessings I will live there happily.
Dwelling fourteen years in forests, honouring words my father trothed,
I shall hasten back here mother, do not be with sadness wrought."

Rama's gentle and soft spoken words,
Struck her like arrow, pain bestirred.
His graceful speech with fear did blight,
Like rain the prickly plant doth strike.

Stricken with grief she could not speak,
Like roaring tiger stuns deer meek.
She trembled as tears welled in eyes,
Like swallowing foam, fish quivering lies.

She saw Rama's face, heart's anguish stilled,
Kaushilya spoke, emotion filled,
Your father love you dearly, son!
Your deeds his heart's delight become,

To crown you he proclaimed intent
For what offence to woods now sends?
Tell me what makes his wishes turn,
Who brings the fire Surya's clan to burn?

Rama glanced towards minister's son, who did events relate,
Hearing his words she mute became, her anguish none can state. 54

She could not stop, not send away,
Her heart would suffer in both ways.
The Will of God is never straight,
Seeking the moon Rahu did state.

'Midst love and dharma Kaushilya tossed,
Like snake seeing mole is vexed in thought.
To keep her son if she proposed,
Dharma would be lost, brothers opposed.

To send to woods was gravest loss,
In helpless distress queen was lost.

Heart firm in dharma resolved to make,
Both Rama Bharat alike to take.

Of simple nature, mother of Rama,
Suppressed her grief and spoke words calm:
"I bless you son, you have done well,
In obeying father dharma does dwell.

Instead of crowning you've been banished, of this distress I am not grieved,
But in your absence king and people, and Bharat will feel bereaved. 55

If king alone had bid you go,
My tears to stop you I'd let flow.
But if both king and queen so please,
Leave palace home for forest trees!

May birds and beasts your welfare see,
Gods goddesses fathers mothers be.
Kings spend their last days as recluse,
But son! you are young for such use!

'Tis forests gain, Ayodhya's sorrow,
We'll pine for your love from the morrow.
In woods with you I'd spend each day,
But ask not lest I stand your way.

Of all you are beloved, son!
The life and soul of every one.
To let you part you calmly ask,
My grieving heart I have to mask!

Of sorrow I make not mock show, You are Infinite Love and Bliss,
I pray for you and bless you son, your earthly mother can do this. 56
May gods and sages guard you son, whether from us you're far or nigh.
May they protect you night and day, as eyelids do protect the eye.
And so my son remember this, and see what you can do,
To come back quickly while we live only to wait for you.
I bless you Rama! my son, my Lord! in grief you leave us all,
Yet go to woods with joy in heart, to answer dharma's call!"

6. SITA SEEKS TO ACCOMPANY RAMA

Hearing the news of Rama's banishment, Sita hastened to mother Kaushilya. Touching her feet, she sat near her with her eyes fixed on the floor. Kaushilya blessed her and was deeply distressed as she gazed upon

her young beautiful body:

To Kaushilya Sita made haste, hearing banishment's news,
Touching her feet, sitting on floor, her gentle heart with pain suffused.
57

Seeing Sita sweet, young and fawn eyed,
Kaushilya at her anguish sighed.
Sita in Rama's devotion lost,
Sat with head bowed in thought engrossed.

"Ayodhya leaves lord of my heart,
Of me with him he'll keep which part?
Body and heart, or heart alone,
God's Will Supreme cannot be known!"

Her toes in anguish tapped the ground,
Her anklets tinkling in low sound.
As if they played the melody sweet:
'May we never be parted from Sita's feet!'

Seeing Sita's eyes full of tears, Kaushilya's heart was moved with tenderness. Knowing the anguish in Sita's heart she softly spoke to Rama: "Son! beautiful and delicate Sita is beloved of our family and darling of my heart. She is the daughter of great Janaka, king amongst kings; her father-in-law is the Sun of the Solar race; and her husband the moon which blossoms the lotus buds of the Surya clan. She is dearer to me than life and she has never known discomfort. She has lain on the softest of beds and her lovely feet have hardly ever touched the hard ground. I have cherished her with tender care, never bidding her even to turn the wick of a lamp. This Sita today would follow you to the woods.

Can the chakori which gazes only on cool moonbeams ever bear to even glance at the hot rays of the sun? Can shy and delicate Sita, who trembles even on seeing the picture of a monkey, dwell in forests amongst their terrible beasts? Can this swan which has fared amidst lotus blossoms in the placid lake of gods, bear turbulent rivers and marshy slushes of the woods?

Yet Sita wishes to accompany you to the forests. What is your decision? I would fain seek her support in my days of loneliness if she stays in Ayodhya!"

With loving and discerning words, Rama soothed his mother's pain,
Of arduous of the woods then spoke, sweet Sita to explain. 60

In mother's presence he demurred,
In moment grave spoke love bestirred:

"Princess! listen to my words true,
Do not their purpose misconstrue.

If my welfare and yours you seek,
For you to stay here will be meet.
You will serve mother, my wish do,
In all ways welfare shall accrue.

There is no dharma which is so great,
As on husband's parents to wait.
Whenever for me mother pines,
And love for me torments her mind;

Past deeds to her you will narrate,
And grief of her heart thus placate.
Darling! from nature true I say,
For mother I ask you to stay.

By guru and the Vedas ordained, dharma's fruits you will enjoy,
Recall how self-will Galava pained and King Nahusha destroyed. 61

By father's words I will abide,
Sweet princess! soon be at your side.
Coming days shall soon pass indeed,
O darling mine! my words do heed.

If e'er woods' dangers, love you hold,
You will suffer hardships untold.
Its forests dense, grim trials bear,
Its heat and cold; rain and strong air.

Its paths are strewn with rocks and grass,
Barefoot e'er them you'll have to pass;
Your lotus feet, tender and soft,
Cannot o'er hills bear you aloft.

Frightening is sight of chasms deep,
O'er rivers, ravines, cave and creek;
Fear of wolves, tigers, elephants, bears,
Drives calmness from who thither fares.

Sleeping on ground, barks will be clothes, food will be fruits and roots,
And even these not every day, but as it Nature suits. 62

Amidst thickets fierce demons fare,
Disguised, to human beings ensnare.
Bracken water from hill streams flows,
Great are the perils forests pose.

Woods harbour deadly snakes and birds,
Fair maidens steal demons in herds.
Woods dreadful e'en in thoughts appear,
Fawn-eyed love! you by nature fear.

Swan-like your gait, for woods not meant,
I'll censure face if I assent;
The swans which sport in Manas lake,
Can they to salty ocean take?

On mango trees sweet koyals sing,
Can forests grace to their song bring?
Reflect on sufferings forests give,
O moon-like love! at home here live.

Who heed not guru, husband's words, for one's welfare by nature meant,
Shall later have deepest regrets and surely suffer, folly bent." 63

With tear filled eyes sad Sita heard,
Her husband's gentle loving words.
Her heart forlorn by his advice,
Like chakvi pining in moon light.

She languished silent in unrest,
Fearing he would leave her distressed.
Her fawn like eyes with tears did smart,
But sorrowing Sita calmed her heart.

She softly spoke, her hands did fold:
"O mother pardon my words bold.
What my lord bids me is the best,
For my welfare and for the rest.

But I have thought well in my heart,
I cannot bear from him to part.

Love of my heart! Abode of pity! Exalted Lord: O Bounteous One!
Moon that opens the kumud bud! without you heaven would hell become!
64

Teacher friend sister or brother,
One's own family, father, mother,
Husband's parents, other near ones,
Even love of ones own dear sons;

Without husband, all such ties,
Hotter than sun's rays burn wives.
Body, home, e'en life on earth,

Away from husband have no worth.

Gems are burdens, joy turns to pain,
The world indeed burns like a flame.
Your love denied, nothing my lord,
Can for me peace or joy be called.

Like lifeless body, stream that's dried,
Is wife her husband's side denied.
O lord! my life's joys you contain,
Seeing moonlike face I'll peace attain!

With you besides me in the woods, beasts shall love without malice,
The bark of trees shall be my clothes, a hut of leaves my palace. 65

Gods and goddesses of the wood,
Will guard me as my parents would.
Our beds of grass and blossom sprouts,
Shall be as soft as Kamadeva's couch.

Woods fruits like nectar sweet shall be,
Like palace domes the hills I'll see.
Bowed to your lotus feet all day,
Like chakvi bright I will be gay.

The woods discomforts you unfold,
Its fears and perils, heat and cold.
All these together there may loom,
They'll equal not separation's gloom.

Considering this, my husband dear.
Take me with you, leave me not here.

Without reason I beseech you, O my lord! Exalted One!
You are merciful and you live in the hearts of every one!
Redeemer of sins! Bestower of peace! O gracious lord of my love pure,
Left in Ayodhya without you, I cannot live of this I'm sure. 66

My feet shall tire not seeing your feet,
Treading paths hallowed by your feet.
I'll look after you night and day,
Tending your tired limbs on our way.

Happy in heart, I'll wash your feet,
Under a tree fan you to sleep.
Seeing sky blue face, its drops of sweat,
No thought shall I have of regret.

I'll make grass bed on level site,
Massage your weary limbs all night;
Gazing betimes on handsome form,
Hot winds my body will not harm.

On me who can dare evil eyes,
With you my darling by my side?
I'm tender? You for forest meant?
I live in ease—you hermit sent?

Sound of my darling's words so harsh, breaks not my rock-like heart,
It seems deep anguish is my lot, living from love apart." 67

Thus imploring her beloved husband to allow her to accompany him to the woods Sita wept before her lord.

Rama saw that Sita could not bear even the thought of separation and that she would surely pine away if she were to stay behind at Ayodhya.

"Come with me love", he said. "Think not of the perils of the future and prepare for our journey to the woods with a happy heart."

Rama then bowed to his mother's feet and received her blessings, "Return quickly, my beloved son, and keep me in your heart. Ah! when will the day come when I shall tenderly embrace you in my arms and call to you 'my darling son!' I bless you, O noblest of Raghu's clan!" 68

Sita then respectfully fell to Kaushilya's feet. "Unhappy am I in my fate", she sobbed amidst tears, "that I leave when I should serve you. I beseech your love, my mother!"

In voice choked with emotion Kaushilya blessed her saying: "May your married bliss be as everlasting as the confluence of waters of the Ganga and Yamuna." 69

7. LAKSHMANA SEEKS TO ACCOMPANY RAMA

Lakshmana filled with anguish when he heard of his brother's banishment, hastened to him and fell at his feet. His body trembled and his eyes were full of tears:

Gazing at Rama he found not speech,
Like fish for water would beseech.
"What does", thought Lakshmana, "fate intend,
Of peace and joy is this the end?

What would the Lord for him decide,
To leave or keep him by his side ?"
Bereft of body, family's thought,
With folded hands Rama's orders sought.

Then spoke Lord Rama, gentle and kind,
Ocean of Bliss, of loving mind:
"Brother of future peace have thought,
Do not in my love he distraught.

Sons who have served their parents feet and in their guru faith have lain,
Have reaped the fruit of life on earth, others have only lived in vain. 70

So brother for you it is meet,
To serve steadfastly parents feet.
Bharat Satrughan are not home yet,
Our father aged must solace get.

At such a time if you depart,
Our kingdom good will fall apart.
To our people, the queens and kings,
Our absence deepest grief will bring.

To solace them so you must stay,
Let not misfortune come our way.
If sorrow does people inflame,
Our father every one will blame.

Stay then Ayodhya's peace to keep".
Lakshmana heard Rama in distress deep,
His trembling body colour lost,
Like lotus withered hit by frost.

Steeped in love Lakshmana clasped his feet, in faltering words he then replied:
"I'm your devotee Lord" he sighed, "left by you I must here abide." 71

"Lord your advice is good for me,
But things unknown I cannot see.
Shastra Veda and knowledge are for those,
Who life's purpose in moksha repose.

Nurtured in your love since life's dawn,
Can Sumera be lifted by a swan?
I've sought not love of father, mother.
I've only cared for your love, brother!

All bonds of love, of worldly way,
Of love and faith of which Vedas say,
Are all for me in your form cast,
Redeemer of woes! knower of hearts!

Edicts of dharma, custom are meant
For those seeking enlightenment.
Lord! I'm devotee of Thy Feet,
In mind and action and in speech."

Lakshmana's words of deep devotion when Rama Ocean of Mercy heard,
He gently clasped his brother's arm, knowing grief within his heart that stirred. 72

"Brother! take mother's leave" he said,
"Let's start the forest paths to tread."

Lakshmana hastened to mother Sumitra and told her what had transpired, and that Gracious Rama had permitted him to accompany him to the forests. She was greatly distressed on hearing of Kaikeyi's treachery but she calmly permitted Lakshmana to accompany Rama. "Son" she said, "Sita is your mother and Rama your father. Consider Ayodhya to be where ever Rama resides. If Rama goes to the forests, Ayodhya is no place for you. Where the Sun is, there is light. 73

Go with Rama, son! Fulfil the purpose of your life! Do not fall under the sway of attachments, anger, jealousy or pride. Serve Sita and Rama with unflinching devotion. Strive to make Sita and Rama happy and comfortable and to forget of parting from the king and queen.

I bless you son! May your love for Sita and Rama be ever constant, ever firm and ever increasing." 74

Lakshmana bowed silently to his mother and taking her blessings, returned to Sita and Rama on their journey to the forests. 75

8. RAMA LAKSHMANA AND SITA LEAVE AYODHYA

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita prepared to start on their journey to the woods where they were to spend fourteen long years. Together they proceeded to King Dashratha's palace to take leave of their beloved father. Rama spoke softly to the king: "We have come to take your blessings, O father. Pray do not despair at this occasion. To hold the fair name of Raghu's clan, we must not be led by attachments to deviate from the path of duty."

The sorrowing King Dashratha was heart-broken, he clasped Rama's hands and seated him beside himself. "O Rama" sighed the king, "sages proclaim you to be the Lord of all creation. God in Divine Justice apportions fates according to good or bad actions. This is the precept of Scriptures and such is the verdict of mankind. What is the justice of Divine Dispensation on this occasion ?" exclaimed the king in tremulous voice. "One incurs sin and another bears the punishment! What is the mystery of Divine Will?" 77

In his great distress he tried to dissuade Rama, but knew by his silence that he was determined to fulfil the words pledged by his father. Then he implored Sita to stay behind. Sumentra's wife and Arundhati, wife of sage Vashist, also begged Sita to stay at Ayodhya, but she was adamant as she had made up her mind to accompany her lord. 78

Kaikeyi could not tolerate their lamentations. Burning with anger she brought the hermit's garments, '*kamandals*' and strings of beads and placed them before Rama. "The king hesitates", she said coldly, "because of his intense attachment. Arise Rama! and don the hermit's garments to hold aloft the banner of righteousness."

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita calmly donned the clothes and bowing to sage Vashist, proceeded out of the palace, meditating on Shiva and Parvati within their hearts. 79

People wept as they saw them go. Rama folded his hands in farewell to the people gathered outside in vast multitudes. "O wise citizens", he said, "during my absence I charge you with the custody of the aged king and my mothers. Those will be my best friends who comfort them and do what pleases them." 80

The sorrowing people followed Rama, Lakshmana and Sita as they left Ayodhya. Rama pleaded again and again for them to return but they surged forward, so great was their sorrow. After Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had left, the king summoned Sumentra to his side:

Calming his mind the king then said:
"Sumentra! to Rama take chariot sped!

Tender Sita and princes two, upon the chariot take around.
Show them the woods a day or two, and bring them back Ayodhya bound. 81

The brothers brave may not return,
For Rama from his words does not turn.
With folded hands then him beseech,
To send back with you Sita sweet.

When Sita does woods' perils dread,
Make known to her what I have said.
From us this message to her give:
'Come child, in woods you cannot live.'

At father's place or by my side,
Where you so choose you may abide.
To bring her back use all your art,
Thus I can get some peace in heart.

I'll die, to bring her if you fail,
Against God's will none can prevail!
Show me Rama, Lakshmana, Sita soon! "
Sighed Dashratha and fell in a swoon.

Sumentra heard the royal command and bowed to the king. He sped his chariot to the outskirts of the city where Rama-Lakshmana had reached.

Sumentra conveyed the king's message to Rama and implored him to mount the chariot with Sita and Lakshmana. Rama complied with the king's wishes and sat on the chariot with his brother and beloved wife, bowing within his heart to the city of Ayodhya.

Rama implored the people following him to return to Ayodhya, but after going back a few paces they returned to follow him to the woods.

The first evening Rama stopped on the banks of river Tamsa. Rama was saddened at the sight of the distressed people following him. Late in the night he requested Sumentra to get the chariot ready and take them away from the people, concealing marks of the wheels of the chariot, so that people may not know whither they had gone. 85

In the morning when the people awoke and found that the Lord had departed, there was great lamentation. They blamed themselves for sleeping while they were with the Lord. When they had despaired of trying to find where Rama had gone, they sorrowfully returned to Ayodhya.

They live in grief, engaging themselves in prayers and fasting, awaiting the return of Rama. 86

9. THE MEETING WITH GUHA

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita reached Sringverpur on the chariot along with Sumentra. Rama alighted at the banks of the Ganga and bowed to the holy river. Lakshmana, Sumentra and Sita also paid their respects and gazed upon its wondrous waters as Rama related legends of the grandeur and majesty of the heavenly river of bliss. They bathed in its cool waters and were refreshed after their arduous journey.

O Tulsi, recalling whose Name even in mind ends weariness in life, Himself seeks to dispel weariness!

This is only for the fulfilment of His earthly birth.

The Pure Sat-chit-ananda Eternal One, the banner of Surya's clan, performs deeds of His earthly life to provide a bridge to cross the Ocean of human existence. 87

When Guha, the forest chief, heard that Rama had arrived, he called his men together and came with offerings of fruit and edible sweet roots for the prince. Rama received him with great affection and enquired after their welfare "O Lord" said Guha, "welfare is in obeisance to Thy Lotus

Feet! Pray do me the favour by coming to my abode."

"O friend" said Rama gently, "by the commands of my father I am to spend fourteen years in the forests as hermit. I cannot therefore enter your village home." 88

Guha was sorely distressed to hear of Rama's banishment. Towards the evening Guha spread a charming bed of grass and tender leaves for the Lord. He placed before Rama sweet, delicious fruits. Thereafter Sita and Rama lay on the ground to rest their tired limbs.

Lakshmana massaged Rama's feet for sometime. When he knew him to be asleep, he softly requested Sumentra to retire to bed. He then picked up his bow and arrows and prepared to keep guard over his beloved lord and Sita as they slept. Guha also came and sat by Lakshmana's side.

As Guha saw Rama asleep on the ground, his eyes brimmed with tears and in tender words he spoke to Lakshmana:

"Of Dashratha's palace such is fame,
As dazzles brighter than Indra's name.
Terraces laid with jewel and gem,
As if Kama himself had set them

Beauty dwells there in comforts all, sweet scented flowers their fragrance spreads,
Cool lustrous light from jewelled lamps, falls softly on each glamorous bed. 90

Cushions of velvet, spreads of silk,
Mattresses soft like foam of milk.
On such beds Rama slept with his bride,
Eclipsing Kama and Rati's pride.

That same Sita, Rama asleep today,
Weary on ground, 'midst grass and hay.

Loved by friends, parents, people all,
Who had maids, servants at their call,
Who had sweet comforts all around,
That same Sita, Rama sleep on ground!

Whose father Janaka, might doth wend,
Of Indra, her spouse's father friend;
In holy wedlock with Rama bound,
Today that Sita sleeps on the ground!

Are Sita Rama meant woods to tread?
Supreme is Fate indeed, as said!

Kekaya's daughter Kaikeyi forsooth, has done a vile and wicked thing.
Which in their moment of great joy, such grief to Sita, Rama does bring.91

'Gainst Raghu's tree the axe she hurled,
Her folly bringing grief to world!"
Seeing Sita, Rama sleep on the ground,
Thus Guha was with anguish bound.

Then Lakshmana gently spoke with wisdom,
Devotion and renunciation:
"None dispenses peace, distraction,
All reap fruit of their own action.

Meetings, partings and emotions,
Friends and foes are all delusions.
Wealth poverty, birth and death,
Ups and down are strands of life's web.

Like a beggar dreams of kingdom, or a vagabond of heaven's god,
Waking both are disillusioned, so should earthly life be thought. 92

Knowing this, be not inflamed,
Nor should any one be blamed.
Living in world of attachment,
Actors in a dreams involvement.

Those enlightened are awake,
Worldly cudgels do not take.
Those who heed not worldly treasures,
Have the best of life's real pleasures.

Bonds hold not discerning minds,
In Rama's Feet contentment finds.
Your mind and action in Him keep.
In his devotion all your speech.

The Soul of souls, by no words known,
In Rama, the Formless grace has shown.
Beyond reason, Infinite Bliss,
Vedas sing of Him: 'Not this! Not this!'

Such is Rama! God Incarnated, come to redeem human beings,
Those who live in His devotion are saved of worldly undoings." 93

"O friends" said Lakshmana, "consider this, and be not given to attachments. Devote yourself at the Feet of Rama." As they stood guard, the night was thus spent in talking of the glories of the Lord.

10. SUMENTRA RETURNS TO AYODHYA

In the morning Rama took his bath in the holy Ganga. He sent for some sap of the bargad tree and both Rama and Lakshmana matted their soft curly hair and coiled them on their heads in the manner of hermits.

Sumentra was sorely distressed as he saw the two princes transformed into hermits. He gently addressed Rama: "Lord, King Dashratha had commanded me to take you on the chariot to the woods; show you around for a few days and bring you back to Ayodhya with Sita and Lakshmana. These were the kings command. Now tell me what is your behest." 94

The gracious Rama spoke softly to Sumentra: "O wise sire! you are learned in dharma. You know that the path of Truth must not be forsaken. Shivi, Dadhichi and Harishchandra endured countless afflictions but would not let dharma be transgressed. Rantideva and Bali kept their faith through many trials. There is no virtue equal to truth. Thus declare the Vedas, Shastras and Puranas. I beseech you return to the king and beg of him not to be worried about us." 95

All stood in silent grief as Rama spoke these words. Meanwhile Lakshmana could not restrain himself from speaking some bitter words about the injustice of banishing Rama. The Lord was embarrassed by his outburst and begged Sumentra not to convey his words to the king.

Sumentra then requested Rama to send back Sita.

The king's message then Sumentra gave:
"Sita woods hardships cannot face.

Here or in Mithila her to stay
Both Rama and you should seek a way.
Or else no strength I'll have to live,
Like fish sans water life I'll give.

In Ayodhya or her father's home, Sita will comfort find,
Till this misfortune is over, to live as suits her mind." 96

"The king's state of love and distress,
I have no words which can express."
Hearing king's message of love deep,
To counsel Sita Rama did seek:

"If these few years at home you spend,
Anguish of parents, kins will end."
Sita said: "Lord thou learned art,
My dearest one! Love of my heart!

Reflect O lord! Merciful one,
Can sunlight be without the sun?

Can shadow without body be?
Can moonlight from the moon e'er flee?"

Thus did Sita her love beseech.
Then said to Sumentra in soft speech:
"Like father you seek my welfare,
To answer you yet do I dare.

Forgive me sire, pray take not ill, I speak in grief and pain,
Without my husband's lotus feet, all bonds for me are vain. 97

My father's name vast glory brings,
In his court bow many crowned kings.
E'en such a home, abode of bliss,
Without my husband, useless is!

Father-in-law's majestic name,
In fourteen worlds has glittering fame.
Even Indra rises him to greet,
Giving him half his throne for seat.

Such king's lovely Ayodhya town,
Dear mothers, family of renown;
Of these, without Rama's lotus feet,
Not e'en in dreams I comfort seek.

Bow to the king on my behalf, and thus to him beseech,
I am by nature happy here, for me he should not grieve. 98

Rough paths of forests and hill steep,
Elephants, tigers, streams, lakes deep.
The kols bhils, the deer and beasts,
Will comfort me with Rama's feet.

My lord by side, and Lakshmana dear
Holding bow arrow, I've no fear.
I will tire not, nor sorry feel,
For me therefore he should not grieve."

"Thus, sire, I beseech you tell my revered father and mothers-in-law."

Sumentra stood by the side of the chariot with a heavy heart. Rama consoled him in many ways. Sumentra too tried to persuade Rama again and again to return to Ayodhya but Rama remained steadfast to his words. So great was Sumentra's anguish that he could not bear to return alone to Ayodhya.

Gently Rama bade him farewell and pressed him to hasten back to the king.

With a distressed heart, Sumentra turned the chariot towards Ayodhya. 99

11. THE BOATMAN'S DEVOTION

Leaving Sumentra, Rama arrived on the banks of the Ganga with Sita and Lakshmana. They had now to cross the river and the Lord beckoned to a boatman to bring his boat.

The boatman stood by hesitantly:

A boat on Ganga's bank Rama sought,
The boatman said: "Lord I dare not!
The dust of Your Feet I have known,
Creates people even out of stone!

From rock a woman make you could,
My boat is only made of wood.
It will become a sage's wife,
I will thus lose trade of my life.

By boat's earnings my children live,
No other means of bread to give.
To cross the Ganga if you seek,
Lord, let me wash dust off Your Feet.

I'll wash Your Feet, take You across, no other wage at all I want,
This is the truth I swear my Lord! Merciful Rama! my prayer grant!
Unless you let me wash Your Feet even if Lakshmana does plant,
An arrow through me, I will not, with You on my boat take a chance! "
Thus steeped in Lord's devotion deep, the boatman spoke these bungled words,
Rama smiled at Sita and Lakshmana as His devotee's words he heard. 100

The gracious Lord then thus did speak,
"Do that by which boat you may keep!
But be quick, do not make us wait,
We must leave soon before it's late."

The Name by which men oceans ride,
The Lord Who stepped earth in two strides,
To cross the river patience keeps,
The Lord devotee's prayer thus meets.

Allowed to do what he had willed,
The boatman a bowl of water filled.
In highest joy, devotion deep,
Engrossed he washed Rama's Lotus Feet.

Gods sung in rapture of Rama's grace,
Seeing in his heart devotion's place.

When he had washed Rama's Holy Feet, the boatman took the waters home,
Across the Ganga he took them, thrilled with the mercy Rama had shown. 101

As Rama stood on the river's bank,
With Sita Lakshmana Nishad flanked,
The boatman bowed before the Lord,
Rama wished to give him his reward.

Sita her husband's wishes knew,
Her jewelled ring from hand she drew,
Rama's Lotus Feet the boatman clasped,
The ring to take as wage when asked.

"Lord what have I not earned today?
My sins and sorrows washed away.
For wage I labour every day,
God gives me my reward today!

Your Benign blessings when I earn,
For what riches need I now yearn?
On your return what you will give,
I'll take to treasure till I live."

The boatman did not take the ring, though Rama, Lakshmana and Sita pressed,
The Gracious Rama then sent him back, with his own deep devotion blessed. 102

12. SALUTATIONS TO GANGA AND VISIT TO SAGE BHARADWAJ

Rama then took his bath in the holy river and prayed to goddess Parvati. He bowed his head in reverence to Lord Shiva.

Thereafter, with deepest respect, Sita addressed her prayer to Holy Ganga:

Folding her hands said Sita sweet:
"Mother! my heart's desire do meet.
With lord and Lakshmana safe I may
Return and to your glory pray."

At Sita's words in deep love stirred
From Ganga's depth a voice was heard:

"O Janaki! Rama's beloved wife!
Who knows not glory of your life!
By your grace humans heaven attain,
At your service siddis remain.

To me you have addressed your prayer,
This is for me an honour rare!
Yet Goddess great! I do bless you,
So that my own words may come true!

For your beloved, Lakshmana you: Ayodhya shall with ardour wait,
Your heart's desire shall be fulfilled, your glory shall the world per-vade!"
103

Sita was filled with peace on hearing the blessings of Ganga. Rama requested Guha to return to his abode but he begged to be allowed to accompany them further.

The Lord then invoked Ganesha and Shiva and bowed in reverence to the holy river Ganga. He then proceeded to the forests with Sita and Lakshmana. Guha the forest chieftain accompanied them.

They stayed the night under a tree. Next morning Rama paid reverence to Prayag, the king of pilgrimages. Truth is the minister of the king; Faith is his queen; Veni Madhava is his companion; his treasury is full of the four fruits of wealth, dharma, actions and salvation. The width of the river is his kingdom. The realms of his kingdom are guarded by a fort, unassailable by sins. The confluence of river Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati is the throne. Akshayawat is the canopy; ripples of Ganga and Yamuna rivers serve as fans, keeping the kingdom cool and destroying sorrows and woes. Pure saints serve the king and desires of all human beings are fulfilled. Vedas and Puranas are the bards, singing the glory of the king. 105

After bathing in the sacred waters of Triveni and paying deep reverence to Shiva, they proceeded to the ashram of the great sage Bharadwaj.

Rama bowed to the august sage who hastened to clasp Rama to his heart. He asked them their welfare and then spent some time in prayer to bring peace to their hearts. After they had partaken of fruit and edible roots, the sage spoke gently to Rama: "My pilgrimages and penances have been rewarded this day, O Rama beholding Your Gracious Form my prayers, meditations and austerities have borne fruit; yea, all my disciplines have seen fulfilment! This is indeed the ultimate in peace and in all

attainments. All my desires and all my aspirations have been fulfilled gazing on Your Merciful Form. Unless one is devoted to You in mind, action and speech, having renounced all guile, one cannot attain peace! " 106, 107

The gracious Lord in His earthly form was embarrassed at the sage's effusiveness. Rama then narrated the sage's illustrious qualities to those present. "O sage" said Rama "one who earns thy grace is fortunate indeed. He alone is great. He alone is the abode of good qualities! "

As people in Prayag heard that Rama had come to the ashram of sage Bharadwaj, they hastened thither to behold the gracious lord. They stayed the night in the ashram. Next morning, Rama took leave of the sage. "Lord", he asked Bharadwaj, "advise me which path to take." 108

"All paths are known to you O Rama!" he exclaimed. The sage then directed four of his disciples to accompany Rama and show him the forest paths.

After they had acquainted themselves with the forest paths, Rama requested the disciples to return and bestowed the boon of His devotion upon them. They crossed the river Yamuna and bathed in its sky-blue waters.

Villagers living along the banks of the river heard that two handsome princes along with a maiden of rare beauty had come to the forests. They ran to see them and were enthralled to behold their glamorous forms. They wondered who they were but were shy to ask them. Some elders recognised them and informed them that they were going to the forests on commands of the king. The villagers gazed at them in thrill, but their hearts were full of sorrow.

A hermit at that moment came,
Young handsome with luster aflame.
As ascetic dressed, a poet unknown,
In mind speech action, Rama's love borne.

His body thrilled seeing his Lord's form, tears flowed from seeking eyes,
Love has no words, he fell on ground, from which he would not rise.

Rama raised Him to His heart He brought,
Enthralled like beggar gold-stone got.
As if Truth Love stood face to face,
For each the other to embrace.

The hermit then clasped Lakshmana's feet,
With love Lakshmana raised him to greet.
Sita's Feet's dust on forehead placed,
The Mother with Her blessings graced.

Nishad bowed to the hermit's feet,
He was Rama's server pleased to meet.
Thrill of Rama's Love he filled in eyes,
Like starving man wins feast in prize.

Meanwhile the village maidens say:
How could parents send them away?
Seeing Sita Rama Lakshmana's young forms,
They are with deepest love forlorn.

Kind words to Guha Rama addressed, to send him back prevail
He turned at last, his heart enthralled, the Glory of Rama hailed. 111

13. JOURNEY IN THE WOODS

Bowing to the river Yamuna, blue as the sky-blue complexion of the Lord Himself, they entered into the forests. Those who met the tender princes and delicate princess on the way gazed at them in wondrous awe and offered to escort them along the difficult forest paths. Gently Rama thanked them for their offer of assistance and then proceeded onwards. 112

Clouds provided a shade as they walked; gods sent blossoms of flowers wherever they went. Thus they walked on, enthralled by glory of creation. Simple village folks heaped their attentions on them as they passed. 'Rest awhile', some said. Others brought them water. Seeing Sita weary from walking. Rama rested under a bargad tree. 113, 114

Village folks gathered around them gazing at their dazzling beauty. Village women yearned to talk to Sita, yet shyly held back:

The village folks in wondrous awe,
Rama, Lakshmana, Sita coming saw.
The simple women stood amazed,
Like deer by flashing light are dazed.

Bowing shyly to sweet Sita's feet,
Softly to her they thus did speak:
"O lovely one! to ask we seek,
But dare not, being women meek.

Sweet one! forgive our rustic ways,
Our curious minds o'er shyness sways.
These charming youths have won our hearts,
To jewels brilliance they impart!

From these young ones, sky-blue and fair, beauty and glory seems to rise,
Faces as lovely as full moon, like lotus buds in spring their eyes. 116

Their beauty shames Kamadeva forsooth,
O lovely one! who are these youths?"
Hearing their simple love filled words,
Sita wavered but smiled inwards.

Lowering her eyes with shyness seized,
Wishing them not to be displeased,
With fawnlike eyes, kokils voice sweet,
In gentle words she thus did speak:

"The fair one, gentle and handsome,
My husband's brother is Lakshmana.

Then shyly covering moonlike face,
Eyebrows arched towards Rama with grace,
From eyes corners she made a sign,
As if to say: 'He's husband mine!'

They clasp Sita's Feet filled with love and bless with tender grace,
'May your married bliss last as long as Shesha holds earth in place; 117

Like Uma, husband's love you'll get,
Goddess! do not e'er us forget.
With folded hands this love we place,
When you return, these paths retrace.

Goddess! let us see you again!'
They sigh, eyes thirsting on her lain.
Sita calmed them with her words sweet,
Like moon to chakvi moonbeams feeds.

Rama motioned to Lakshmana to ask the villagers the way to the woods. The people were distressed that they proposed to go further into the forests. They then directed them towards the most comfortable paths.

So they went into the woods. The Lord with his beloved wife and ever faithful brother:

Rama walked in front, Lakshmana behind,
As hermits dressed, peaceful in mind.
Sweet lovely Sita in between
Like Maya midst Brahma-Jiva was seen.

Her dazzling form sweet bliss did bring,
Like Rati 'midst Kamadeva and Spring.
Or like amidst Budha and the moon
Was lovely Rohini, Beauty's boon.

Between Rama's footsteps, with great care,
Walked Sita, placing feet elsewhere,
Lakshmana in rear with respect deep,
Stepped not ground hallowed by their feet.

Of Rama Lakshmana Sita's deep love,
No words to sing are sweet enough
E'en birds and beasts their forms behold,
To Traveller Rama their hearts are sold!

All those who saw the Traveller Rama, Sita Lakshmana by side,
Sans effort treaded path of life, in bliss to e'er abide. 123

Later, knowing that Sita was weary, Gracious Rama rested under a bargad tree. They took fruit and edible roots and spent the night there.

14. RAMA MEETS THE GREAT SAGE VALMIKI

Next morning, after they had taken their bath, proceeded further into the woods and admired the beautiful forests, lovely lakes and magnificent hill. Soon they arrived at the ashram of the great sage Valmiki. Rama was delighted at the sight of Valmiki's beautiful ashram, located amidst lovely hills and green woods with pure cool waters in the lakes.

As Rama, Lakshmana and Sita viewed the splendid grandeur of the ashram, Valmiki heard of their arrival and he hastened to welcome them to his ashram. Rama bowed to the august sage and received his affectionate blessings. 124

As Valmiki beheld the gracious form of Rama, he rejoiced, and escorted him to his ashram. Afterwards, he placed before his distinguished guests, dearer to him than his heart, fruits and edible roots for them to eat. He gazed upon their dazzling forms as they partook of the sage's offerings. Then the sage requested them to rest their tired limbs.

Valmiki sat near the Lord. Folding his lotus hands, Rama spoke in a gentle voice, like music to the ears: "O august sage!" he said, "you are all knowing and nothing in the past, present or future is unknown to you. The world, indeed, is like a plum placed in your hands."

Thus spoke the Lord and then he related in detail the circumstances in which Queen Kaikeyi had asked for his banishment. "O Sage!" continued Rama, "it is indeed my good fate to have the occasion of fulfilling my father's commands. My good actions have borne fruit in my beloved and virtuous brother Bharat's accession to the throne of Ayodhya. By my mother's blessings I have had the fortune of paying my respect to you. 125

Beholding your lotus feet, I have today fulfilled my life's quest. Guide me, O sage, where I may reside in the woods during my days of

banishment, without causing any inconvenience to sages who reside in the wood."

Hearing Rama's simple and humble words, the learned sage Valmiki exclaimed: "Hail to Thee, banner of Raghu's clan! Thou art the Word of the Vedas; Sita is Thy Maya that creates, sustains and destroys the world; Lakshmana is the incarnation of Shesha, the thousand fanged serpent that holds aloft the world. Thou hast incarnated Thyself to be the Saviour of the gods.

O Rama! Thy Form is limitless, beyond Knowledge and Indescribable.
Even Vedas speak of Thee as 'Not this! Not this!' 126

Thou art the Vision of the world. Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha hearken to Thy Pleasure. Even they know not Thy Nature. None else can fathom the depth of Thy Bounty.

Only one to whom Thou revealest Thyself can know Thee. When such a one receives Thy Mercy, he merges in Thee.

Thy body is free from the effects of Karma. Only by Thy Grace can one know Thee. Out of Thy Majesty and Divine Pleasure Thou hast created Thy Divine Form and are pleased to follow the human way.

Thou hast Incarnated Thyself for gods and sages. Seeing Thy earthly form, only the ignorant are given to attachments. The learned find peace. Thou dost indeed fulfil Thy mortal role in the way of humans.
This only the wise know."

In deepest ecstasy the sage then sung to the Lord:

"Lord Thou asketh where to dwell, while I ask Thee in wonder wrought:
I will tell Thee where to live, if Thou tells me where Thou art not!" 127

Pleased with Valmiki's deep devotion, Rama smiled within Himself; Then in voice filled with emotion the sage spoke to the Lord thus:

"Rama! I sing of Thy abode, where Lakshmana, Sita, You may live.
Those whose ears are like the ocean, full of legends of Thy Bounty,
Yet unfilled keep craving for more, live O Lord within their hearts.
Those who open eyed await Thee, thirsting for Thy glorious Form,
Leaving oceans and the rivers for one drop of Thy blest water,
With Thy brother and wife O Rama, live within their zealous hearts.
Those who yearn for Thy Benign Grace in the Ocean of Thy Bliss.
Seeking it like swans in clusters, Rama reside Thou in their hearts. 128
Those who always seek the perfume of the offerings to Thee Lord,
Clothe themselves in simple garments, take food which is blest by Thee;
Those who wrought in deep devotion, bow in reverence to the saints,
Those who worship Thee O Rama! having faith in Thee alone,
Pilgrims of Thy hallowed places, live O Lord within their hearts.
Those who always chant Thy Name and with their family worship Thee;

Make Thee offerings, help their brethren, give the needy charities;
Serve their teachers and the savants, knowing them as Thy devotees;
Those whose sole desire in living is their yearnings for Thy blessings,
Live O Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, in the temple of their hearts.
Those who are free from passions, anger, greed and all desires,
Those who have no wiles, illusions; Lord reside Thou in their hearts.
Loving all and loved by all, moved neither by joy nor pain;
King of speech and true of words, at Mercy of Thy Feet remain;
Seeking only Thy Divine Grace, dwell O Rama in such good hearts.
Free from lust of flesh and longings, treating others' wealth as poison;
Gladdened at well being of others, saddened at their afflictions;
Those who hold Thee dearer than life, Lord reside Thou in their hearts.
Those for whom Thou art the Saviour, friend and guru, father, mother;
Live O Rama with Sita, Lakshmana, in the temple of their hearts. 130
Those imbibing other goodness, suffering to let others live,
Those whose names are sung for piety, make their simple hearts Thy home.
'Goodness Thine and sins are ours'; thus say those with faith in Thee,
Deeply thy love Thy devotees, dwell with Sita in their hearts.
Those who seek not wealth nor greatness, worldly pleasures or their gains,
Leaving all, they seek Thy shelter, Rama reside in their true hearts.
Concentrating in Thy image, caring not for Heaven or hell,
Thine in mind and speech and action, enter Rama in their pure hearts.
Those who seek not ever anything, but Thy simple and deep love,
Lord, live in their hearts for ever, that is truly Thine own home." 131

Thus the learned sage sung to the Glory of the Lord. Thereafter he said: "O Lord of Raghu! I now tell you a suitable place to spend your days of banishment. Reside in Chitrakoot which is a beautiful place, pleasantly located in hills with lovely woods around. It is situated on the banks of Mandakini river, brought there by severe penances by sage Atri's wife Anasuya.

A number of celebrated sages like Atri dwell in the neighbourhood. Grant honour Rama, to the pure and beautiful woods and hills of Chitrakoot!" 132

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita then took leave of the sage and departed for Chitrakoot.

15. RAMA DWELLS IN CHITRAKOOT

Leaving the ashram of the great sage Valmiki, the two brothers and Sita journeyed into the forests of Chitrakoot. They reached the banks of the Mandakini river and took their bath in its silvery waters. Rama said:

"Lakshmana this is a beautiful place. Let us stay here."

Lakshmana looked around and chose a place at a suitable elevation north of the river. With the help of kols and bhils of the area, he quickly built two huts on the terrace with soft leaves and grass.

Living in huts of grass and leaves, Rama Lakshmana Sita glory bring,
As if Kama lived as hermit dressed, with Rati and companion Spring. 133

The gods, digpals and kinnars came,
To Chitrakoot of hallowed fame.
To greet the Lord each of them hies,
And earns with joy fruit of his eyes.

'Midst shower of blossoms gods then say:
'Our guardians, Lord! we've found today.
Their woes and sorrows they impart,
Leave for abodes, happy in heart.

In Chitrakoot the Lord now stays,
This news brought famed muni and sage,
Raghu's clan's Moon, with honour deep,
Bowed head to sages, munis greet,

The munis Rama to bosom press,
Their blessings give for His success,
Rama Lakshmana Sita see joy bound,
'Fruit of our penance we have found'.

Giving regard and honour deep, Rama munis to their ashrams sent,
To pray and perform yajna sans fear, with hearts enthralled the munis went. 134

This news when kols and kirats heard,
They were thrilled like nine *nidhis* earned.
With baskets of *kand*, roots and fruits,
They rushed as if they gold would loot.

Some to brothers wood paths had shown,
They sung of grace which they had known.
Thus Rama's Glory was heard and told,
Till they reached there Rama to behold.

They pay obeisance, offerings place,
And gaze with love at Lord of Grace.
They stand like statues, hearts aglow,
From eyes tears of devotion flow.

Rama saw them lost in rapture deep,
He greeted them with gentle speech;
Betimes they bow, obeisance pay,
In words imploring then they say:

'Now we have Lord! our parents found, our eyes on Lord are lain,
Behold! Kaushal's Lord comes to us! of our Fates such is gain. 135

Blessed is the ground where you have stood,
Blessed is our land, its paths and woods,
Blessed are the beasts, birds which abound,
Beholding Thee, life's fruits they've found.

Blessed are our kins, most blessed are we,
Our eyes to their content, Thee see.
Good place forsooth, you choose to live,
All seasons here sweet comfort give.

We shall serve you in every way,
Snakes, elephants, tigers keep away.
Of forests dense, hills caves and springs,
We know all parts, all little things.

With you for hunting we will go,
All lakes, streams, waterfalls will show.
To serve you with our kins we'll live,
O Lord! be free to orders give.

The Lord Who is beyond Vedas speech; Who is beyond the sages' mind,
Mercy's Lord listens to kirats, as child is heard by parents kind. 136

The Gracious Rama loves Love alone,
To those who know, this should be known.
Then Rama with deepest love bestirred,
To forest dwellers spoke kind words.

Rama bid them go, they bowed to leave,
Went singing hearing Glory's deed.
Thus Sita Rama Lakshmana abide,
In woods to sages' hearts delight.

To dwell in forests since Rama came,
Woods lovely and graceful became.
Fruits blossoms grow on diverse trees,
'Twixt them creepers form canopies.

Like Kalpavriksha, Nature glory gives,
Like gods' garden in woods now lives.
Sweet is music of humming bees,
Cool, fragrant, gentle is the breeze.

Cuckoos, blue jays, parrots, chakors and chakvas fill the air with soft pleasing music. 137

Gods hail the fates of birds beasts and forests of Chitrakoot where Lord Rama dwells with His Divine Consort and faithful brother Lakshmana. 138

Engrossed in the Lotus feet of his beloved brother and beholding the sacred feet of Sita, Lakshmana did not even in dreams pine for home, his brothers, mothers and father. 139

Sita too, was completely happy in her forest home:

With her lord, Sita peace did find,
No thoughts of home came to her mind.
In darling's face, in love engrossed,
Like in the moon, chakori lost.

Seeing Rama's love deeper day by day,
Like spritely chakvi she was gay.
Her heart in Rama's feet Sita bound,
The woods better than home she found.

Their hut she loved with her love near,
Like her family were birds and deer.
Like parents, sages and their wives,
Like nectar sweet roots and fruits wild.

The mat on which with Rama she lay,
Was soft as bed of Kama's array.
Whose glance does soul redemption give,
In her can pleasure's yearnings live?

The Rama whose very thought in mind helps saints to spurn pleasures like straw,
For Mother Sita Rama's dear wife, to leave comforts should cause no awe. 140

What Lakshmana, Sita's mind would ease,
Rama did and set their hearts to please.
He told them legends in sweet words,
With joy Sita and Lakshmana heard.

To Rama when came Ayodhya's thoughts,
His lotus eyes with tears were wrought.

For father and for lonely mother,
For Bharat, dear devoted brother.

With yearnings when Rama was assailed,
He calmed himself, knowing fate prevailed.

Finding Rama to be pensive and sad, Sita and Lakshmana would be distressed even as a shadow follows its substance. Then the Lord of Mercy, to allay the anguish of his darling wife and dear brother, would regale them with tales of yore and they were happy again.

Along with Sita and Lakshmana, Rama dwelt in Chitrakoot in resplendent glory, like Indra who lived in the city of heaven with his spouse Shachi and son Jayanta. The Lord looked after Sita and Lakshmana looked after the Lord's comforts with love and devotion.

16. DEATH OF KING DASHRATHA

After leaving Rama, Lakshmana and Sita on the banks of the Yamuna, Guha the forest chieftain returned to Sringverpur. He found Sumentra still waiting there with his chariot. He was wrought with deep distress seeing Guha return alone. The forest chieftain then narrated how Rama with Lakshmana and Sita had gone into the forests after crossing the river Yamuna.

Sumentra was distressed when he realised that he would now have to return to Ayodhya alone.

On the way Sumentra brooded with grave foreboding: "When the people of Ayodhya will see me return alone on the chariot, they will not like to see my face. What reply shall I give to Lakshmana's mother? What shall I tell Rama's mother when she comes hastening to me like a cow seeking her newly born calf? How shall I face the king and tell him that Rama, Lakshmana and Sita have gone into the woods? He will surely die as he hears these grieving words from my wretched mouth." 145

When he reached the outskirts of the town, he could not find courage to enter the city and he spent the day under a tree outside the city walls. It was dark as he entered the city. Those who saw him hastened to follow him to get news of their beloved Rama. Sumentra entered the palace downcast and silent. In reply to all queries he only asked: "Where is the king ?" He was taken to queen Kaushilya's palace where he found the king lying in soiled clothes, repeating the names of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in a feeble voice.

Sumentra hailed the king softly with customary greetings. Seeing him Dashratha got up hastily and clasped him with his trembling arms. "Where, O where are my sons Rama and Lakshmana?" he wailed, "where

is my pure and beautiful daughter Sita?" 148

As the king sobbed, Sumentra slowly related how the Lord had entered the forests. "Beseech my father' Rama had said, 'not to grieve for me. With the king's blessings, I will spend fourteen years in exile peacefully and return to him to bow to his feet. Tell my mothers to look after my father. Bow to sage Vashist on my behalf and ask him to solace the king so that he does not grieve for me. 151

Tell Bharat not to be overcome with the power of kingship, but to uphold dharma of mind action and speech; and beseech him to treat all mothers as equal. Let not the king have any occasion to grieve for me."

"Lakshamana uttered some bitter words on this occasion. Rama admonished him and made me take an oath that I would not convey his words to you.

Sita wanted to say something, but she was overcome with emotion and was rendered speechless. 152

The Lord crossed the river with Lakshmana and Sita while I remained standing helpless at its bank, watching them depart."

Hearing Sumentra, the king fell to the ground in deep agony. Kaushilya calmed him with loving words. "O lord! " she said, bear grief with fortitude so that we may see Rama, Lakshmana and Sita again."

The king's last moment had arrived,
Like snake without *mani* he writhed.
He grew pale and in anguish sighed.
Withered like lotus in lake dried.

Seeing him, Kaushilya knew in heart,
Surya's setting sun would soon depart.
Then to him calmly she did say,
Soft words his distress to allay:

"Grieve not my lord, by strength abide,
Rama's exile is like ocean wide;
You hold its ship's Ayodhya's oar,
Aboard your subjects seek the shore.

You have to row it to firm ground,
Or people family all will drown.
My love take courage I beseech,
Rama, Lakshmana Sita we may meet."

Hearing Kaushilya's loving words, he raised himself and looked around,
As if one had sprinkled water, on helpless fish writhing on ground. 154

The king said seeking to be calm,
"Sumentra where is my gracious Rama?
Where is Lakshmana and loving Rama?
Where is Sita, and my life Rama?"

The suffering king bemoaned his plight,
Endlessly long appeared the night.
Recalling Sravan's father's curse,
He told Kaushilya his outburst.

He grieved in heart talking of past,
And said: "Now shamed my life to last!
Of what use is this body now,
When lost love brings sorrow to brow?

O Raghu's Joy! Beloved Rama!
Long have I lived not seeing your form!
O Sita! Lakshmana! Rama of fame!
For chatak's heart O Blissful rain!"

Saying Rama! Rama! and again Rama! repeating Rama till his breath lasted,
Renouncing life, yearning for Rama, to gods' abode the king departed. 155

Thus died the great king Dashratha, earthly father of the Lord Incarnate. In death he earned the fruits of life even as in living. Glorious was his life and resplendent was his death, with the Name of Rama within his heart and upon his lips.

The queens were plunged in grief. They wept unconsolably, recalling the glories of their beloved husband. The grief stricken people of the kingdom mourned the loss of their great and noble king. "The ultimate in dharma, and the abode of good qualities, the sun of the Solar Dynasty has set today," they sighed in sorrow.

Vashist calmed the distressed people. He ordered the king's body to be embalmed in oils and sent messengers to bring back Bharat and Satrughan. "Say nothing about the king," he said, "only tell Bharat that his guru has sent for the two brothers."

17. BHARAT'S LAMENT

Bharat and Satrughan sped swiftly to Ayodhya on fast horses as soon as messengers of Vashist arrived conveying the news that their presence was required ungently at Ayodhya. The two brothers crossed rivers and galloped along mountains and woods in deep anxiety as to why they had been summoned so suddenly. In his heart Bharat felt that all was not well:

Each moment seemed long as a year.
As Bharat to the town came near.
Hovering crows loudly did caw,
Reaching Bharat ill omen saw.

As asses brayed and jackals yelled,
Forebodings ill in Bharat welled.

Ponds rivers gardens and the woods,
Had lost their beauty, haunted looked.

Birds sung not, neither peacocks danced,
Horses in listless anguish pranced.

Silently people gazed at him, when hastening Bharat them did meet,
Bharat too did not question them, his anguished heart too full to speak. 158

Men and women with pain were wrought,
As if their treasures they had lost.

As Kaikeyi heard of Bharat's arrival, she hastened to the palace gates and escorted the two brothers with great joy. Seeing Bharat lost in thought she enquired with concern: "Is all well at my mother's place?"

Bharat assured her of their welfare and anxiously asked: "Where is the king ? Where are our other mothers ? Where are our brothers Rama and Lakshmana?"

With a long drawn face Kaikeyi said: "Son! with the help of Manthra I had achieved success. But there has been one mishap. The king is dead."

Bharat was stunned. Weeping for his dear father he fell to the ground in a swoon. "I could not see you ere you departed! You did not put my hand in Rama's giving me to his care!"

Then calming himself he asked: "Mother how did the king die?"

As if putting poison in a wound, Kaikeyi narrated the whole story. Bharat heard her in speechless agony:

Hearing of Rama's banishment, Bharat forgot grief of king's death,
Finding himself to be its cause, he stood silent losing his breath. 160

Kaikeyi consoled her grieving son,
Like sprinkling salt on a painful burn:
"Son for the king you should not weep,
He gained salvation by his deeds.

A while he lived life's fruits he earned,
Now to celestial home returned.
Take courage dear, do not despair,
Rule your kingdom with utmost care."

His mother's words caused Bharat pain,
Like burning coals a wound in flame.
Calming himself he deeply sighed:
"Mother you have us peace deprived.

If your mind had such evil plans,
You should have slain me with your hands.
You've cut the tree, yet leaf would grow,
Want fish to live, yet water throw.

I had kind brothers Rama, Lakshmana, father as brilliant as the sun,
But Destiny must take its course, it was my plight to be your son! 161

When your heart harboured such low thoughts,
Why was it not shattered like rocks?
While seeking boons no shame you felt?
Lost you not speech, tongue did not melt?

How could the king trust in you wend?
God took his wisdom near his end!
E'en God knows not a woman's heart,
A store of wiles, sins and black art!

Upholding dharma, of simple mind,
He knew not guiles of womankind.
In God's whole earth not one is there,
Who loves not Rama, seeks his welfare.

E'en such good soul was foe to you,
Who are you woman, tell me true!
But now begone, O wicked dame,
Been born your son has been my shame !"

While Bharat spoke to Kaikeyi in distress, Manthra arrived dressed in fine clothes. Seeing her Satrughan could not control his fury. He kicked her and she fell to the ground with such a force that her hunchedback and teeth were broken. He held her by her hair and dragged her on the ground as she shrieked in pain. Seeing her striken plight Bharat mercifully restrained his brother.

18. BHARAT SEEKS SOLACE FROM MOTHER KAUSHILYA

Leaving Kaikeyi, Bharat hastened to mother Kaushilya. He saw her lying disconsolate in soiled clothes, pale and withered in body as if a beautiful creeper had been struck by frost. Bharat wept in anguish seeing her sorry

plight: 163

Kaushilya rose to Bharat greet,
With faltering steps on weary feet.
Seeing her pale body, hair unkept,
Clasping her feet sad Bharat wept.

"Show me my father, mother dear!
Why are not Sita and Rama here!
Why was vile Kaikeyi ever born?
Why not barren if she was born?

Alas that she has mothered me!
Cause of our woes and grief to be.
Baser then me can one be found,
Who has caused you such grief profound?

Brothers in woods, our father dead,
Mother these sins rest on my head.
I have become the brushwood's fire,
Of family's peace the vile destroyer!"

Steadying herself Kaushilya rose, as she heard Bharat's words of anguish,
Tears streaming from her weary eyes as she held him weakly in languish.
164

Gently Kaushilya on him leaned.
In Bharat Rama's presence she deemed.
Satrughan his brother then she blessed,
With words of comfort them solaced.

She wiped his tears as Bharat wept,
All hailed Kaushilya for love's depth.
In her own lap she held his head,
Caressing him, she gently said:

"We must brave evil days which come,
So do not grieve, I bless you son!
Set courses in our lives has Fate,
Brood not on what we have to face.

It was ordained, blame no one son,
In everything, God's Will is done.
Full is my cup of grief but still,
I live knowing not God's future will.

O son! to honour father's words, Rama left us as a hermit dressed,

No pain or pleasure in his heart, his mind was tranquil and at rest. 165

No grief upon his lustrous face,
Consoling us he left with grace.
Sita, devoted at his feet,
Stayed not though we did her entreat.

Nor would dear Lakshmana stay behind,
Though Rama had asked him in words kind,
They left us bowing to our feet,
We blessed them and were left to weep.

To woods Rama Lakshmana Sita went,
I followed not, nor my heart sent.
All this happened before my eye,
But even then I did not die.

Of my love I am shamed and sad,
A graceful son like Rama I had.
To live and die the king knew will,
My heart broke not in grief to dwell."

19. BHARAT DECLARES HIS ALLEGIANCE TO RAMA

Hearing Kaushilya's grief stricken words, Bharat and all the queens were steeped in anguish. The palace appeared as if it was the abode of grief. The two brothers lamented, and Kaushilya clasped them in her arms, giving them solace. She consoled Bharat with words of deep wisdom and discernment. 166

When Bharat regained his composure, he narrated beautiful stories from Vedas and Puranas to bring peace to the hearts of his mothers. Filled with emotion, he declared his allegiance to his beloved banished brother:

Bharat in true love hands did fold,
And spoke words gentle pure like gold:
"Of murder, fire or arson, sin
Of killing parents, sons or kin;
Sins small or great, of speech or mind,
Sins of the world of any kind;

If this vile deed be of my mind,
Mother such sins may all be mine.

Those who instead of Rama and Shankar, pray to devils and demons,
If this vile deed be of my mind, my fate be of such evil ones. 167

Those who their own religion sell,
Complain of others, in sin dwell;
If this vile deed be, of my mind,
Mother their sins may all be mine.

Those who are filled with lust and greed,
Who others women, riches seek;
If this vile deed be of my mind,
Mother their sins may all be mine.

Those who love not saintly discourse,
Who from salvation's path turn course;
Who human born, take not Lords Name,
Rejoice not in Shiva's, Vishnu's fame;

Who dharma renounce and sin embrace,
Wicked in heart, disguised in face;
If this vile deed be of my mind,
Mother their sins may all be mine."

Hearing Bharat's pure and true words, mother Kaushilya thus did speak: "O son! you are beloved of Rama, in mind and action and in speech." 168

"For you, more than life, Rama is dear,
So more than all to Rama you're near.
Moon may give poison, hail fire give,
E'en fish may without water live;

Passions with Learning may exist,
But Rama you never can resist.
Who for our grief seeks you to blame,
Not e'en in dreams can he peace claim."

Thus said Kaushilya, Bharat embraced,
Milk flowed from breasts, from eyes tears raced.
In grief bemoaned their anguished plight,
Thus giving solace spent the night.

Vamadeva and Vashist arrived in the morning. Vashist solaced Bharat with tender words and said: "Calm your heart son, and perform the rites of your departed father". 169

Bharat then rose and performed King Dashratha's last rites with deepest respect as directed by sage Vashist.

20. BHARAT REQUESTED TO RULE AYODHYA

After the last rites of King Dashratha had been performed, Vashist

summoned a meeting of the ministers. When all had assembled he requested Bharat and Satrughan also to come to the meeting.

The sage formally narrated the circumstances leading to the banishment of Rama and the death of the king. He told Bharat that the king had ruled gloriously and should not be grieved for, and he requested Bharat to rule over the kingdom of Ayodhya:

Then said Vashist: "Listen Bharat, supreme are Destiny's demands,
Life, death on earth, pleasure and pain, all occur as the Lord commands. 171

Considering this let us not seek to blame,
Nor against any one our wrath inflame.
Calm yourself son, and in your heart thus think,
And grieve not for death of Dashratha the king.

Grieve for a priest who leaving dharma's ways,
In sense pleasures' brief comforts spends his days.
Grieve for a king who duties royal forsakes,
Lost in his glory, wretched people makes.

Grieve for the rich who alms do not give,
Vain of their wealth, devoted not to Shiva.
Grieve for the fools who heap insults on wise,
Who boastful and conceited themselves prize.

Grieve for the woman who her love deceives,
Crafty and self willed cunning wiles conceives.
Grieve for the pupil who avoids his work,
Lazy and careless, guru's precepts shirks.

Grieve for those who full of yearnings fail to perform detached duties,
Grieve for sages lost in Maya, turning from knowledge, austerities. 172

Grieve for the hermit who denial flaunts,
Yet shuning penance worldly comforts wants.
Grieve for the gossippers, ill tempered ones,
For those opposing parents, wayward sons.

Grieve for the ones who others seek to harm,
Cruel and lost in sense pleasures of Kama.
Grieve for the wicked ones without a doubt,
In mind, in speech and action not devout.

Grieve not O Bharat for Dashratha the king!
Of whose good name and fame the world shall sing.

O Bharat there was not nor e're shall be,
A king so noble for the world to see.

E'en Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra shall sing,
In glorious praises of Dashratha the king!

In what words can homage be paid to the king who was so great and true,
Who had four pure and noble sons: Rama, Lakshmana, Satrughan and you. 173

The noble king was blessed in every way,
'Tis needless in his grief for you to sway.
So be not sad, not be distressed in vain,
Obey his royal commands to kingdom reign.

The king of pleasure gave the throne to you.
Your king and father's words you must prove true.
He banished Rama for Raghukul's honour's sake,
Though grieving his own life he did forsake.

He gave his life but true to words remained,
So you must gladly do what he ordained.
Sage Parashurama his father's words fulfilled,
As the world knows, his own mother he killed.

Yayati's son gave his youth to his old sire,
Blessings he earned for honouring his desire.

Those who obey their father's words, questioning not the right or wrong,
Live in contentment till they die, their spirits then are heaven borne. 174

Your father's royal commands you must observe,
Forget your grief, wear crowń and people serve.
Our noble king's spirit will then find rest,
It is no sin, you shall be surely blessed.

In Vedas, Puranas and history 'tis well known,
The son a king wills, succeeds to the throne.
So rule Ayodhya's kingdom, grief forsake,
Be calm in heart and my advice do take."

"Without a doubt", continued the sage, "Rama and Sita will be pleased when they hear that you have fulfilled the king's commands. The learned shall not find fault in your action, and the people of Ayodhya shall be happy.

"When Rama returns to Ayodhya after completing his period of exile, hand over the crown to him and serve him with love and devotion."

The ministers spoke in support of the sage's proposals. Mother Kaushilya also besought Bharat lovingly to accept the crown and rule over Ayodhya. "Son! respect the advice of the sage" she said, "Rama is in the forests. Our king is in heaven. You are the only support for the family, the people and for your mothers."

21. BHARAT REFUSES THE CROWN AND RESOLVES TO MEET RAMA IN THE FORESTS

Sage Vashist's speech and the approval of the ministers were as comforting to Bharat as the cool fragrance of sandal wood. When he heard mother Kaushilya's tender appeal he was overcome with emotions and tears streamed from his eyes arising from desolation in his heart.

Calming his distress he stood up to speak while his mind was weighed with the conflict within him. Bowing to sage Vashist he said: "O wise and respected elders. My guru has indeed given me good advice. All ministers and people of the kingdom have also expressed their concurrence to his proposals. My mother commands me to do likewise. I would indeed like to do as I have been advised because one should obey his guru and parents and heed the advice of his well-wishers. Yet my heart finds no peace, Pray listen to what I have to say and guide me to do what will be best for all of us. Forgive me for speaking to you frankly." 176

"With my father in heaven and my revered brothers Rama and Lakshmana and respected Sita in the forests, you ask me to wear the crown. In this you say is our welfare. Alas! my duty was devoted service to Rama and Sita. This I have been deprived of by Destiny and my scheming mother. To rule over the kingdom of Ayodhya without serving the holy feet of Rama and Sita is worthless. It is like wearing ornaments without clothes or seeking renunciation without knowledge. Just as pleasures are futile for an afflicted body and prayer is futile without devotion; so is life in Ayodhya futile for me without Rama. I have considered this well within my heart. There is no other path which I can see for me to take. Give me leave to go to Rama. I am deeply grateful to you for considering me worthy to wear the crown even though you know me to be Kaikeyi's son. Action is sterner than cause. I bear with fortitude my sins which have caused this disaster to Ayodhya. Let me, I beseech you go to Rama. He will forgive me and return with me to Ayodhya."

Humbly turning towards sage Vashist, he bowed and concluded by saying:

"I have humbly acquainted you with anguish deep within my mind,
Without seeing form of gracious Rama, peace in my heart I cannot find. 182

No other way my heart does show,
State of my mind my Rama doth know.
To him I humbly wish to go.
E'er dawn another day doth show.

Though I have sinned and am to blame.
The evil cause of our grief's pain;
Yet seeing me at his gracious feet,
Forgiving Rama will surely greet.

Mercy's Abode, my Rama is kind,
Gracious, loving, gentle, benign.
Even his foes he does not chide,
In spite of faults I am his child.

Elders redemption help me seek,
Give me your blessings I beseech.
When Rama will hear my humble prayer,
Ayodhya's crown he still may wear.

Of evil woman I was born, have been a sinner and have erred,
Rama will forgive me I am sure, in pity for his brother stirred." 183

All present hailed Bharat's sweet speech,
Enthralled by his devotion deep.
Those who for Rama's Benign Grace pined,
New hopes and joy in heart did find.

Sage Vashist and all the ministers praised Bharat for his noble decision, steeped in devotion of Rama. They hailed him as the true image of his gracious brother.

The people made joyful preparations to accompany Bharat and to set out on the morrow to pay respects to their beloved Rama in the forests. 184

22. BHARAT LEAVES AYODHYA TO MEET RAMA

When the people of Ayodhya heard that Bharat was going to meet Rama in the forests, all of them wanted to accompany him. Returning to his palace, Bharat learned of the deep devotion people had for Rama. But he considered it his duty to arrange for the safe custody of the treasures of Ayodhya and the administration of the kingdom which belonged to Rama. He called for his most trusted men and gave them detailed instructions to look after the wealth of the kingdom during his absence.

After he had made necessary arrangements he went to meet mother Kaushilya.

Seeing grief writ on his mothers brows, Bharat who knew love's call
Asked palanquins to be made for them, replete with comforts all. 186

Men, women were listless in heart,
Like chakwas seeked dawn to depart.
Thus through the night they kept awake,
Then to ministers Bharat spake:

"In woods Vashist will hail Rama king,
For regal rites prepare all things."
Bowing to Bharat they quickly sped,
Ere morn they horses, chariots led.

On chariot for royal rites prepared
Vashist with wife for forests fared.
Then followed many learned priests
On chariots and luxurious steeds.

On dazzling chariots next went queens,
Such lovely palanquins ne'er were seen.
Then people of Ayodhya surged,
On various steeds by Rama's love urged.

To guard Ayodhya's treasures safe, trusted men Bharat kept,
Then taking Rama's name in his heart Bharat with Satrughan left. 187

Pining, they hastened, faces wan,
Like thirsty elephants water drawn.
Of Rama's travail when Bharat thought,
In anguish with Satrughan he walked.

Seeing their deep love devotion bound,
People their chariots did dismount.
Her palanquin Rama's mother then led
To Bharat and in soft words said:

"A chariot take, I bless you son,
Or all of us to grief will come.
Seeing you walk, all are on their feet,
They cannot walk, with grief being weak."

Bowing, Bharat to her will agreed,
Both brothers then mounted their steed.

The first night they halted on the banks of river Tamsa, and next night they reached the banks of river Gomti. And those who followed Bharat ate frugally and were unmindful of discomforts, for all of them remained

engrossed in thoughts of their beloved Rama.

23. BHARAT MEETS GUHA

After spending the night on banks of the river Sai, they reached Sringverpur. When Guha, the forest chieftain, heard of Bharat's arrival he was distressed, as he believed that Bharat's intention was to secure the line of succession for himself.

With these thoughts in mind, Guha summoned his men. "Be alert!" he commanded. "Surround the ghats and take possession of all boats. Be ready to wage battle and die if need be. While I live I shall not let Bharat cross the river. I will sacrifice my life for Rama. Whosoever is not a devotee of Rama treads the earth in vain! " 189

Hearing their leader's commands, *nishads* hastened to arm themselves, picking up swords and their steel helmets they rushed forward. Seeing his warriors assembled, Guha struck the war drum.

As they prepared to move forward, an elder of their clan said: "I advise you to meet Bharat first. Me thinks he comes not to fight but to beseech Rama to return to Ayodhya."

Guha accepted the old man's advice. "The ignorant act in haste but later regret their impetuosity. Wait, my warriors! I will meet Bharat and gauge what he has in mind. Love and hate do not remain concealed". 192

As the forest chieftain approached Bharat and his entourage, he saw sage Vashist amongst them. From a distance he bowed to the august sage acquainting him with his name. Vashist blessed the forest chieftain and told Bharat that he was a friend of Rama. As Guha bowed to Bharat, he clasped the forest chieftain in his arms filled with delight as if he had met Lakshmana himself. Thus did the great prince of Ayodhya meet and greet one who was considered low in birth by social codes. Indeed! all who take the name of Rama are blessed by Him and none may call such ones impure! 193, 194

The forest chieftain then met Shatrughan and others who accompanied Bharat. He bowed respectively to the queens who blessed him as they would bless Lakshmana. Bharat was delighted on seeing Sringverpur.

Bharat looked to the comforts of all who had come with him and assured himself that they were all attended to. He left Satrughan to look after the queens. When all had retired to rest for the night, Bharat took Guha with him and begged him thus:

"Show me that place" Bharat then asked,
"To cool my eyes and calm my heart;
Where Sita, Rama, Lakshmana did lie."
Thus Bharat said with tear filled eye.

Hearing his words in reverence deep,
Guha took him where Rama did sleep.

As Bharat saw the Ashok tree under which Sita, Rama did rest,
He knelt upon the hallowed ground deep love surging within his breast. 198

Seeing the *kush* mat upon the ground,
He bowed his head and took a round.
Dust of Rama's footprint held to eye,
That moment's love all words defy.

Of Sita's dress, seeing thread of gold,
In respect deep, to head did hold.
Heart full of grief, tears in his eyes,
To his dear friend, Bharat thus sighed:

"Without Sita, these threads shine not,
Like Ayodhya is with sorrow wrought.
Janaka's daughter, who can compare,
In whom does wisdom, peace repair!

Whose father-in-law Dashratha was,
Who e'en of Indra's envy was cause;
And whose husband dear Lord Rama is,
Who grants mercy out of his bliss.

That peerless Sita's bed I see, made from a mat of grass,
Yet of distress my heart breaks not, 'tis hard as steel alas! 199

Love's prize gentle Lakshmana does win,
None is, or was, nor'll be like him.
Beloved of people, of parents pet,
Sita's and Rama's love he does get.

Those tender ones of gentle build,
Whose bodies never touched hot wind;
The wood's discomforts have to face,
My heart alas, still does not break!

Our kingdom shone when Rama was born,
All qualities did his form adorn.
To people, family, parents, priests,
Rama's nature brought the highest peace.

Even his foes to Rama give praise,
He wins them all by speech and grace.
Thousands of Saraswatis, even Shesha,
Cannot great Rama's qualities narrate.

Lord of peace, pride of Raghu's clan, Abode of joy, Heavenly Bliss!
That glorious Rama sleeps on a mat, the Will of God so supreme is! 200

Of sorrow Rama ne'er even heard,
Our father gentlest care conferred;
Mothers to their hearts kept him nigh,
Guarding as eyelids guard the eye.

That Rama now eats fruits of the wood!
Lives in a hut and walks on foot!"

"Shame on Kaikeyi!" sighed Bharat, "who opposed even her beloved husband. Shame on me! I became the cause of all these woes. God created me to become the disgrace of the family, and my erring mother made me the opposer of my lord!"

Hearing Bharat's words of distress, Guha solaced him with deep love: "Lord! Needlessly do you lament your fate. You love Rama and Rama loves you. This is the essence of reality Destiny hath its own course, which misled unfortunate Kaikeyi. The night Rama spent here, he repeatedly praised your love and gentle nature. None is as beloved of Rama as you! This I declare on oath. Therefore you must not feel distressed. Come now. The hour is late and you should rest." 201

His heart calmed by Guha's soothing words, Bharat retired for the night.

24. BHARAT'S SALUTATIONS TO GANGA

Next morning they left Sringverpur. Guha led the way with the palanquins of the queens following him. Thereafter went sage Vashist with the party of priests. Bharat walked on foot, his horse led behind him. People requested him to mount his steed but Bharat only sighed and said: "Rama went on foot! Are horses and chariots meant for me?" 202

Repeating the names of Sita and Rama in devoted love, Bharat reached Prayag in the afternoon, 203

On Bharat's feet large blisters grew,
On lotus leaves, like drops of dew.
As he limped on his weary feet,
People around him stood to greet.

When others had taken their bath,
Bharat came to Triveni's ghat.
He bathed where clear blue waters met,
And bowed to sages as they blest.

Seeing blue Yamuna and Ganga meet,
With folded hands he did beseech:
"King of holies! You grant desire!
O song of Vedas! Men you inspire!

Though clan forbids, from you I beg,
Ill fate makes people dharma transgress.
Knowing this kind people, so Vedas say,
Fulfil desires of those who pray.

I seek not wealth nor sense pleasures, dharma salvation do not desire,
In this birth, next, and those that come, to Rama's devotion I aspire. 204

Even if sin has been my lot,
Even if I am family's blot;
Love of Sita, Rama grant me please!
May my devotion e'er increase!

Rain may the chatak never reach,
Give hail while it does water seek;
But chatak begs for water still,
As e'er devoted, firm of will.

Like gold when heated brightly glows,
Devotion lustres as it grows!"
With love Triveni's waters stirred,
From its bosom, a voice was heard.

"Bharat with virtues you're replete,
You have deep love in Rama's feet.
Be not distressed, this know as true,
Rama loves no one as much as you! "

Hearing Triveni's solacing words, Bharat's body was filled with rapture. Gods in heaven hailed Bharat and showered flowers from above. 205

All those who dwelt in Prayag: hermits, celibates, house-holders and recluses, were filled with peace on beholding Bharat. 'True and pure is Bharat's love and gentle nature', they said amongst themselves in admiration of the prince of Ayodhya, who sought his brother's love rather than the kingdom's crown.

25. BHARAT MEETS SAGE BHARADWAJ

After paying obeisance to Triveni, and listening to the glorious deeds of Rama, Bharat reached the ashram of the great sage Bharadwaj. As he

bowed to the august sage, Bharadwaj hastened to him and clasped him in his arms.

Bharat sat hesitantly before the sage. "How shall I answer him", he thought to himself, "if the sage questions me?" Seeing embarrassment written on his face, Bharadwaj gently spoke: "Listen Bharat! I have heard of all the happenings; do not despair of Kaikeyi's actions. God's Will is supreme and her wisdom was misdirected by Saraswati. 206

To say that Saraswati misled Kaikeyi into this misfortune, may even not be accepted by all, because the learned consider both Vedas and worldly ways to be equally important. But O son! singing of your gentle deeds, both Vedas and worldly ways shall be honoured.

It is well known in Vedas as well as in worldly practice, that the son whom a father wills gets the throne. Even if you had accepted the crown of Ayodhya you would have acted according to the Vedas and regal customs. But what you have done is infinitely better. To have devoted love in the Lotus Feet of Rama is indeed the root of all bliss on earth. 207

Listen O Bharat! None is as beloved as you for Rama. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita praised you the whole night that they stayed here while on their way to the woods.

That which seems a reproach to you O Bharat, is an example for all of us: it is indeed an occurrence which heralds a new era of devotional love. 208

Son! the moon of your dazzling devotion to Rama shall never wane. Each day it shall become brighter than before. Every one in the three worlds shall gaze upon its radiance like chakwas, deriving from it the strength and rapture of devotion.

King Bhagirath brought Ganga, the abode of all peace, from the heavens to the earth; King Dashratha's glorious deeds bear no equal in the world; but greater than these indeed, is the glory of your devotion in the Holy Feet of Rama.

O Bharat! being detached, I take no sides; being a hermit, I speak not words only to please; abiding in woods I have no concern with anybody; yet I truthfully declare that when I beheld the gracious forms of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, I considered that I had attained the fruit of all my spiritual disciplines.

Now I solemnly affirm before this gathering of saints that more glorious than that fruit of infinite blessedness, I now get on meeting you! Blessed indeed is my fate! Blessed is the fate of Prayag, the king of pilgrimages!" Thus said the great sage Bharadwaj. Bharat's body quivered with emotion. With thoughts of Rama within his heart, tears streamed out of his eyes. Greeting the saints with folded hands, he spoke in a voice choked with emotion: 210

On hallowed ground and amidst saints,
Taking an oath does virtue taint.
If one talks here in untrue words,
No sin, no evil could be worse.

"O sage! my words are without art,
You know the secrets of Rama's heart.
Of mother's wile I feel not blow,
No fear have I of being called low.

No thoughts of salvation I bear.
Nor father's death brings me despair.
His noble deeds for ever shine,
He had Rama, Lakshmana sons divine.

For Rama his body he did leave,
No cause is there for him to weep.
Rama, Lakshmana, Sita walk on feet,
In forests fare, hermits garb keep!

With barks for clothes, fruit is their fare, they sleep on bed of leaves,
Trees are their homes, heat and cold bear, they suffer rains and breeze! 211

For them I grieve, my heart does bleed,
I fell no hunger nor can sleep.
The world I have searched in my mind,
But for my pain no cure I find."

"O sage" sighed Bharat in deep despair, "this misfortune can only end if Rama returns. Then alone can Ayodhya flourish again. There is indeed no other remedy."

Sage Bharadwaj solaced Bharat with gentle words: "Do not brood, O son, you will find peace within your heart when you meet Rama."

The sage then invited Bharat and the people of Ayodhya to spend the night at his ashram. Bharadwaj summoned the siddhis and directed them to provide such comforts to his guests as had never before been enjoyed by mankind. Wondrous indeed were the luxuries and entertainments that were lavished upon the people of Ayodhya. Even Brahma had not witnessed such splendour. The abodes of Indra, Varuna, Yama, Kuvera paled before the magnificence of the extravagant luxuries which the people enjoyed. Spring had come. A mild cool fragrant breeze blew around. Beautiful damsels carried garlands and sandalwood paste to greet each guest. Nothing was wanting and all got what pleased their fancy.

Amidst the luxurious entertainments of the gala night, Bharat did not let their tantalizing charms even touch his mind! 215

26. BHARAT'S JOURNEY IN THE WOODS

Next morning Bharat bathed in the holy Ganga and bowing to sage Bharadwaj begged his leave to depart for Chitrakoot. The sage gave him an affectionate send off and deputed some trusted guides to accompany the party. Bharat walked with his hand clasped in Guha's and his heart engrossed in Chitrakoot!

His feet unclad, bare was his head,
In dharma intent, in true love led.
Rama Lakshmana Sita's deeds he heard
Guha relate, devotion stirred.

Rama's resting places, shades of trees,
Bharat saw, heart emotion seized.
Seeing his deep love gods blossoms sent,
Paths smooth became where Bharat went.

Clouds shade provided where he walked, the breeze was cool and calm,
To Bharat paths more comfort gave, than they had done for Rama. 216

All creatures that beheld Rama's grace,
Had earned salvation seeing his face.
But now with eyes on Bharat turned,
They got salvation they had earned.

'For Bharat this bears no surprise,
In Rama does love for Bharat rise.
The Name of Rama who e'en once takes,
For himself place amongst saints makes.

Bharat is loved by such a Rama.
How could his journey not be calm?'
Thus filled with joy gods sages said,
Within their hearts Bharat they blessed.

When Indra saw Bharat's love for Rama,
His heart was seized with deep alarm.
To Brihaspati then he thus did say:
"Let not Rama Bharat meet I pray!

For Bharat is ocean of love, and Rama is gentle in his heart,
To fulfil mission of the gods, do something by your power's art!" 217

Hearing his words gods' guru smiled,
Sees not e'en Indra the thousand eyed!
"On Rama's devotee who tries wile
Suffers himself for his own guile.

O king of gods! Rama's nature hear,
'Gainst Him who sins, no wrath may fear;
But who 'gainst His devotee turns,
In flames of wrath of Rama he burns.

The Vedas and history's course this shows,
The truth of this Durvasa knows.

Who can for Rama be like Bharat!
The world seeks Rama, Rama seeks Bharat!

O king of gods! think not at all of thwarting Bharat in his way,
Or else you will the world's blame bear, your grief will grow day by day. 218

O Indra in error do not fall,
Rama loves devotees most of all.
His heart to His devotees goes,
Who seek to harm them are his foes.

Though He is calm, no wrath does bear,
For sins of past He does not care;
Justice in actions he does keep,
As one does sow, so does he reap!"

"O king of gods!" Brihaspati, the guru of the gods continued, "devotees of Rama are always engrossed in the welfare of others. Bharat is indeed the perfection of devotion. Do not fear on his account. Rama is true to his words and he has championed the cause of the gods. Bharat will undoubtedly respect his commands." 219

Indra found peace in Brihaspati's words of wisdom. His fears being set at rest he hailed Bharat's devotion and showered flowers upon him.

Thus Bharat trod the forest paths. Whenever Bharat sighed with the name of Rama upon his lips, everything around him quivered with love.

Halting for a night, Bharat reached the banks of river Yamuna. Watching the sky blue waters of the river Bharat was lost in devotion for Rama and tears streamed from his eyes. They stayed the night on the banks of the river while boats were collected to take the party across. 220

Early next morning they took the forest path. The village women who had seen Rama and Lakshmana fare through the woods wondered at their resemblance with Bharat and Satrughan who now walked gracefully before them. "O friend" said one village damsel to another, "they are of the same age and build; they have similar features and the same gait; but neither have they the sweet lady with them, nor are they dressed as hermits. They bring with them an army and instead of peaceful contentment, their

brows are steeped with anguish." 221

Then a wise one who had spoken to one of the party said: "O friends! This is Bharat, the prince of Ayodhya who has refused the crown and now goes to beg of his brother Rama to return to Ayodhya. Who is like this great prince whom we behold today?" 222

One more night they halted on the way and next morning Guha pointed out the resplendent hill near which Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had taken abode on the banks of the Payasvani river. Bharat was filled with joy and he bowed in reverence towards the hill as the people broke out in jubilation with cries of: "Glory to Rama, beloved of Janaki!"

Even Shesha cannot relate the thrill of love experienced by Bharat at that moment. For poets to sing of that glory is as impossible as the attainment of Brahma's Bliss by one who is steeped in pride and greed. 225

27. LAKSHMANA'S APPREHENSIONS

Rama sat in front of his hut in his ashram facing the north. Looking into the distant woods he saw dust rising in the air and birds hovering above the trees flying towards the ashram. He heard the sounds of jungle beasts drawing close to them. Rama was alarmed at this sudden disturbance in the tranquillity of the woods. Just then kols and bhils arrived and informed Rama of Bharat's arrival with the people of Ayodhya and his army. 226

Rama was filled with joy and tears welled in his eyes, but he wondered why he came attended with an army.

Lakshmana gauged the feelings within Rama's heart, and he also wondered why Bharat came to the woods with the people of Ayodhya and his army. He quivered with anger and bowing to Rama respectfully, narrated his apprehensions:

"Without your consent Lord I speak,
Devotee can no rudeness seek.
You are the knower of all deeds,
Yet hear me Lord as my mind heeds.

Lord you are primeval Mercy, Your bounteous love to all impart,
Of gentle nature you trust all, and all are equal in your heart.

But given grace and lured by senses,
In ignorance man virtue dispenses.
Bharat is skilled, saintly and true,
Famed his devotion pure to you.

But getting throne turns insincere,
Of dharma unmindful ventures here.

Our cunning scheming brother rides,
Thinking Rama here alone abides.

With evil plans in his mind born,
He seeks the kingdom without thorn.
Turning people with crafty lies,
Hither with armies Bharat hies,

No evil if they had in mind,
Why elephants horses at this time?
Why blame Bharat for leaving creed!
The world is drunk by kingdom's greed!

Moon dishonoured his guru's wife, Nahush made saints his palaquin lift,
King Vena lowliest of them all, would not let Veda and dharma exist. 228

Sahasrabahu, Trishanku, Indra the god,
Were all besmirched by sceptre's rod.
Bharat does what others would do,
Disputes and wars are carried through.

But Bharat makes one great mistake,
For you alone to be he takes.
Today he will his error know,
Vanquished and humbled he shall go!"

Thus said Lakshmana devotion urged,
His warrior blood within him surged.
He bowed to touch Rama's august feets,
And spoke brave words without conceit:

"O lord! forgive me my content,
Bharat comes here with mean intent.
How long can we thus suffer sorrow,
Let us now lord, use bow and arrow.

Kshattriya by caste, in Raghukul born, in your devotion I am bred,
Dust is lowly, but walked upon, it seeks to rise upon the head." 229

With face determined Lakshmana rose,
Like Valour had from sleep awoke.
Hair coiled, his quiver at waist band,
Bow firmly held, arrows in hand.

"Today devotion's fruit I'll reap!
Bharat in battle lesson teach!

Insulting Rama he shall soon weep!
With Satrughan on battle's field sleep!

It's good the people he has brought,
They'll see justice he set at naught.
Like tigers do wild elephants maul;
On birds as eagles swiftly fall;

So Bharat and his warriors all,
Shall by my hands answer Death's call!
To save him e'en if Shankar fares,
To kill him Rama's devotee swears!"

Hearing Lakshmana's violent anger and the sacred vow he'd taken,
People of the world were frightened and the valley's hills were shaken. 230

When people were in terror steeped,
A voice from heaven was heard to speak:
"Lakshmana! all know of your great might,
Who can against you dare to fight?

But first consider right or wrong,
Action can then be well performed.
Who rashly act, Vedas call unwise,
Regretting acts they did not size."

Lakshmana drew back, hearing the gods,
First blessing him, then spoke the Lord:

"Wise and true brother, are your words,
From dharma crown's glory kings has swerved.
But only those who flout the saints,
Vainglory and regal might taints.

Even in Shiva or Vishnu's seat, Bharat will have devoted heart,
In Milk's Ocean can drops of lime, cause milk from its water to part? 231

Darkness may o'er sun's rays pervade.
Clouds may the sky entire invade;
In water sage Agastya may drown,
The course of earth may turn around;

A fly's breath may move mount Sumera,
But Bharat can't by power be swayed! "
I swear on thee and father's name,
No brother like Bharat bears fame.

Good and bad qualities world contains,
Water in milk unseen remains,
But like swan born in Surya's clan's Lake,
Bharat from virtue, vice separates.

Milk's virtue takes, water's vice shuns,
Bharat's fame dazzles like the Sun."
As Bharat's qualities Rama recalled,
He was in Love's Ocean enthralled.

Gods heard Rama's words declaring love for Bharat pure and deep,
They hailed the Gracious Rama and said: 'Which Lord such Mercy keeps!' 232

If Bharat had not taken birth,
Who would have shouldered Dharma on earth?
Poet's words his virtue cannot show,
Only you, Rama! know their rich glow.'

Rama, Lakshmana, Sita heard gods words,
In deepest love their hearts were stirred.

28. THE MEETING OF RAMA AND BHARAT

Meanwhile Bharat with the people of Ayodhya had reached the banks of Mandakini river. Bharat took his bath in the sacred waters and then requested the people to wait there. Taking permission of sage Vashist and him mothers, he proceeded with Satrughan and Guha towards Rama's abode. His heart was full of anxious forebodings, but he went ahead with unflattering steps, immersed in deep devotion of the Lord.

Seeing the green forests around the hermitage, Bharat soon rejoiced in his heart, like a person rid of the seven calamities and three afflictions. He was filled with love as an ascetic is overjoyed when, after completing his vows, he reaps the fruits of his penances.

Unseen by anyone, Bharat reached the holy ashram amongst the thickets.

His grief ended on hallowed ground,
As if one had salvation found.
Lakshmana stood still before the Lord,
Devotedly, deeply absorbed.

As muni dressed, hair coiled on head,
His quiver filled, in hand bow held.
Rama, Sita sat on a raised mound,
With saints and sages all around.

With lovely Sita, sky-blue Rama,
Like Rati and god of love Kama,
Sat smiling, hand upon his bow,
Making all hearts with joy aglow!

Amongst the sages gathered there, Rama, Sita dazzled like the Sun,
As if amidst men of learning, Devotion Bliss had themselves come! 239

With Satrughan, Bharat stood lost,
Pain, pleasure, sorrow, joy forgot.
"Save me my lord! O lord save me!"
He weakly sighed and fell on knee.

Lakshmana on hearing Bharat's voice,
With pleasure felt his heart rejoice.
To greet Bharat his heart did yearn,
Waiting on Rama, he could not turn.

Devotion bound, wishes repressed,
No words his conflict can express.
Desire to service he did tie,
Like soaring kite one let's not fly.

He bowed gently to Rama and said:
"Lord! Bharat waits to pay respect!"
To greet Bharat, Rama quickly rose,
Unmindful of his bow and clothes.

The Lord of Mercy clasped Bharat, straining him to his loving heart,
People around them stood amazed, wondering how the two would part! 240

What words can meeting's love relate?
For poet beyond mind, speech and fate.
In blissfilled love entwined their hearts,
Mind, wisdom, intellect, Ego part.

That love supreme how to impart?
Has poet wisdom of such art?
Known feelings are in words retold,
Like dancer's steps by tunes controlled;

Bharat-Rama's love is Love Supreme,
Bramha, Vishnu, Shiva's minds cannot dream;
Of Love so lofty can I sing?
Can tunes be rendered on grass strings?

Seeing way in which Rama Bharat met,
The gods were with deep fear beset.
Hearts calmed by guru of the gods,
They blossoms strew and Lord applaud.

Rama then embraced Satrughan with love, Guha he warmly met,
Then Lakshmana bowed to Bharat greet, his arms around him pressed.
241

Lakshmana met Satrughan with love deep,
Then clasped Guha to warmly greet.
Bharat, Satrughan to munis go,
They bow, munis blessings bestow.

Bharat Satrughan in reverence deep,
Bowed to take dust of Sita's Feet;
They stood each holding back a tear,
Blessing them Sita drew them near.

Too moved when love did thus pervade,
Within her heart she blessings gave;
Finding her pleased in every way,
No more remorse did Bharat sway.

No words were spoken, nothing asked,
Love lost its limits, filled all hearts.

It was a moment of silent love and emotions. No one spoke and none asked questions. It was a reunion of those Destiny had thrown apart, yet yearned for each other.

29. RAMA, LAKSHMANA AND SITA MEET THE PEOPLE FROM AYODHYA

After a few moments Guha gently said: "With sage Vashist have come the queen-mothers, the people of Ayodhya, the army commanders, and ministers, who pine to meet you."
242

When guru's name heard Sea of Grace,
Near Sita he Satrughan placed;
He ran enthralled—Who is e'er Calm!
He dharma upholds! Mercy's Lord Rama!

Seeing guru Rama Lakshmana were thrilled,
Lay on the ground, imploring, stilled;
Vashist hastened to clasp in arms,
Love overflowed in greeting warm.

Guha his name then humbly took,
Bowing to the sage, at distance stood;
Sage Rama's devotee clasped to heart,
As if gathering Love's scattered parts.

'Rama's devotion is Welfare's Cause!'
With flowers from heavens gods applaud.
'Who like Guha low-born on earth?
Like Vashisht who bears noble birth?'

More than Lakshmana for Guha felt Vashist in meeting greater zeal,
This power of singing Glory's Songs of Sita's Lord Rama doth reveal. 243

Rama turned to greet his mothers. So grief stricken were they that they looked like creepers withered in the frost:

Rama hastened first Kaikeyi to meet,
Calming her mind, bowing to her feet.
With gentle words solaced her heart:
'As God Wills, so Fate plays its part.'

Then gracious Rama all mothers met, allaying their grief to them he spake:
'All things on earth are as God Wills, none should be blamed for course of fate.' 244

Then bowing to Arundhati's feet,
Rama, Lakshmana wives of priests did meet,
As if Gauri, Ganga they met;
With deepest love they brothers blest,

They met Sumitra in love wrought,
As if a beggar wealth had got.
To Kaushilya, Rama, Lakshmana went,
Love blossomed which in heart lay pent.

She clasped them and her body glowed,
Her streaming tears upon them flowed.
Their grief and joy who can relate?
How can one dumb, sweet's taste narrate?

Leaving their dear mothers embrace.
Rama asked Vashist to ashram grace.
The sage first asked people around,
To pitch camps on the wooded ground.

With Vashist, mothers and the priest, along with elders of the state,
Lord Rama with Lakshmana and Bharat came to the holy ashram's

gate. 245

There Sita bowed to Vashist's feet,
Blessing of heart's desire received.
Then his wife Arundhati did greet,
Of their deep love no words can speak.

To sage's wives she bowed in turn.
From each she sweet blessings did earn.
When Sita queen mothers did see,
She closed her eyes so pained was she.

As if royal swans in snares were caught,
'God has grief wrought' she sadly thought.

Seeing Sita they sighed in despair,
'What God ordains one has to bear',
Calming her heart Sita did rise,
Tears streaming from her lotus eyes.

Each mother-in-law she did clasp,
In tender pathos all were cast.
Heart filled with love, clasping their feet, each mother Sita met,
O'ercome with love, for married bliss, all mothers Sita blest. 246

Thus Rama, Lakshmana and Sita met the people of the kingdom of Ayodhya from which he had been banished, and the people of Ayodhya reaffirmed their allegiance to their beloved banished prince. 246

30. RAMA LEARNS OF KING DASHRATHA'S DEATH AND BHARAT'S ANGUISH

After the emotional meetings with Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in which tender joy was mingled with touching pathos, Vashist requested the people to be seated and hearken to him.

The sage gently informed Rama of the sad death of his father King Dashratha. Rama was deeply grieved. Finding that the king's intense love for him was the cause of his death, Rama was sorely distressed. Lakshmana and Sita wept on hearing the tragic news and the whole assembly was steeped in sorrow. So poignant was their grief that it appeared that the king had died that very day.

Vashist consoled Rama and bade him perform the rites of his departed father. They bathed in the holy Mandakini and Rama performed the last rites as directed by sage Vashist. 247

Two days thus passed in the woods. Rama then requested Vashist: "O

sage! the people are bearing great hardships in the forests. They live here only on fruits and sweet roots. Each moment turns into eternity for me seeing the sufferings of Bharat, my mothers, and the ministers.

Therefore, O sage, I implore you to return with them to Ayodhya. With you here and the king in heaven, the kingdom remains unattended.

"O Rama" said Vashist, "you are the abode of dharma and mercy. It behoves you to say so, but the people of Ayodhya seek the solace of your company. Permit them to stay for two more days". 248

Great was the rejoicing amongst the people on the news of postponement of their departure for two days. They bathed in the pure waters of the Payasvani river and flocked to Rama's ashram, beholding his gracious form. Kols, kirats and bhils brought honey and fruit for them, narrating their various qualities and tastes. They talked with the people of Ayodhya in gentle words of sweet affection, thanking God for the kindness bestowed upon them in allowing them to behold and serve the gracious Rama. The people of Ayodhya envied them their fate.

In thrilling joy each day went by,
One knew not how the time did fly;
Rama's mothers were amazed to find,
Sita served all at the same time.

Only Rama did this miracle know,
From Sita Maya's power doth flow.
By service Sita won their hearts,
Blessings advice they did impart.

Seeing Sita's love for brothers both,
Queen Kaikeyi's heart was filled with woe;
She prayed to Yama to end her life,
But God denied her peace from strife.

All wise men know and Vedas declare,
Who Rama oppose get peace nowhere.
This anguish tortured every heart,
Will Rama come back or stay apart?

As the two days went by, Bharat grew more and more distressed,
Bharat could not sleep nights, nor hunger felt in day,
Like fish in shallow waters writhe, in restless anguish lay. 252

'In mother's form fate does me fail,
Like ripe rice fields smitten by hail.
How can Rama be installed as king,
My anguished mind no hope doth bring.

Rama will return if Vashist says,
But 'gainst his mind speaks not the sage.
Kaushilya's wishes Rama would keep,
But why will Rama's mother so seek?

What can I, his devotee say,
God frowns on me, bad is my day.
If I insist, from dharma I'll sway,
More than Kailash does duty weigh.'

No way he found, though many sought,
The night he spent in anguished thought.

Thus Bharat spent the days in the woods, deeply distressed within himself. Soon he would have to leave for Ayodhya. Nothing had yet been done to persuade Rama to his kingdom and accept its crown.

31. THE MEETINGS IN THE FORESTS

I. Vashist's Address And His Proposals

In the morning Bharat took his bath and was sitting lost in his pensive thoughts. Soon word came to him that Vashist desired his presence. When he went to him he found that all the ministers and saints had assembled before sage Vashist. Bowing respectfully to the sage, Bharat took his seat in the assembly. 253

Vashist then addressed the gathering:

To speak to them Vashist did rise,
He said: "O friends and Bharat wise!
Our journey has brought us to Rama,
Let us now think with our minds calm.

Rama is The Word and Truth on earth,
To champion virtue taken birth.
Abiding by parents' commands,
The gods he helps, demons remands.

Of love, welfare, custom and self,
None knows better than Rama Himself;
Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesha, creatures all,
Earth, moon and of the future call;

Glory of gods and sayings divine,
Songs of the Vedas, learned sublime,
Ponder O wise men and think well,
In Gracious Rama all these do dwell.

Therefore for us it would be best, in Rama's will to abide,
Knowing this the course that we should take, let us today decide. 254

Rama's rule will surely bring us peace,
This is the path that we should seek.
Let us now think how we may bear,
Our prayer to Rama the crown to wear."

Words of wisdom which Vashist spoke,
In all devotion did evoke.
All silent sat with bowed head,
Then folding hands Bharat thus said:

"Many great kings the world has seen,
Of fame and virtue they have been.
Though born kings by their royal birth,
Fruit of actions they reap on earth.

Your blessings lone ends anguish sage,
Turning grief into joyful days.
Even gods hail respect to you,
Guide us, O sage, with your own view.

Why ask me now what we should do, what can I say with my ill luck?"
The touching words that Bharat spoke, in Vashist's heart deepest love struck. 255

Said he: "Faith in Rama's Feet not lain,
Ends in life's quest for peace being vain.
To my mind hence, there comes a way,
To save half, give one half some say.

You and Satrughan in woods sojourn,
Let Rama, Lakshmana, Sita return."
Weighing loss and gain the sage all hailed,
But sons alike, queens' faces paled.

Both brothers were filled with delight,
There faces were with joy alight.
Their bodies dazzled, sorrows drowned,
Like Dashratha lived and Rama was crowned.

Said Bharat: "What the sage advises,
Gives to Ayodhya what she prizes.
In woods my life entire I'll spend,
Happy my days, peaceful my end.

Rama and Sita know peoples heart, and you are wise O learned sage,
Pray do now what has to be done, Ayodhya's sorrow to assuage!" 256

32. THE MEETINGS IN THE FORESTS (Continued)

II. Vashist Confers With Rama

Having obtained Bharat's concurrence to his proposals, Vashist along with the ministers and saints came to Rama. The Lord bowed to him and gave him a seat of honour. Aware of the momentous occasion, the wise and august sage addressed the assembly keeping in mind the welfare of the people of the kingdom of Ayodhya:

"Hearken wise Rama! Thou knowest all!
Of custom, dharma, Thou answerest call!

Thou dwellest in everyone's heart, and knowest good or evil mind,
Bharat and those who grieve with him, seek Thy behest O Lord Benign!
257

No reason in sad heart remains,
A gambler cares only for gains."

Hearing Vashist Rama then thus spoke:
"To do is in your hands, O sage!
Abiding by the path you show,
Sweet peace and welfare can we know.

First tell me what to do I pray,
I will do gladly what you say.
Tell us, O sage, what would be meet,
To do as you wish, all here seek."

The sage said: "You have spoken well,
But Bharat's love does me compel.
That is why I repeat and say,
Bharat's devotion does me sway.

What he desires, for us to do,
In Shankar's name, is my wish true.

Let us hear Bharat calmly first and think o'er what he has to say,
Consider dharma, people's welfare, the kingdom's good and chose our way."

33. THE MEETINGS IN THE FORESTS (Continued)

III. Bharat's Speech Before The Lord

Rama was delighted to know of the deep love Vashist had for Bharat. Moved by overwhelming emotion he said: "O sage! I say with faith in your kindness that in the whole world there never was a brother of the like Bharat nor will there ever be one like him."

"It is not customary to praise a younger brother in his presence, but I agree that we should rely upon his wisdom and do what he says. I am sure this will be good for all of us."

The sage then turned towards Bharat and said: "Son! do not hesitate. Speak out your mind to your dear beloved brother who is the Ocean of Mercy." 259

Bharat stood up respectfully in the assembly. "Lord", he said, "from my very childhood I have never forsaken your company. Nor have you ever denied me anything." Turning towards Vashist and other sages he continued: "Even when I was losing at games which we played in our childhood, my beloved brother always contrived to let me win. I have never found occasion to ask the Lord for anything because, of his own accord, he has always given me what I desired.

My eyes yearn for his gracious form for beholding his gracious form. But God has denied me this pleasure. By her cruel guile, my mother has placed a wall between my brother and me. But I should not speak thus of my mother. For who amongst us is good, and who is wicked ? It is only my misfortune that has resulted in this calamity; depriving me of the joy of my life. 260

My only fortune is grace of our guru and affection of Rama and Sita." The sage consoled him and calmed his heart.

Rama had been sitting in a contemplative mood, listening to Bharat, in wrapt attention. He was moved by his words steeped in exalted devotion. Clasping Bharat's hands he said:

"Brother! in heart do not despair,
In hands of God the jiva doth fare.
In all three Times and all worlds Three,
None like you saintly, wise can be.

To blame you for this deed who dares
Shall here, hereafter, fruitless fare.
Those witless mother Kaikeyi taint,
Who have not served guru and saint.

Bharat! your name all ignorance, sins and ill-omens end,

Fame in this world one will attain, peace in Beyond attend. 263

I firm declare: Shiva witness bears
The world on your support doth fare;
Brother! no proof for you one needs,
Of love and hate clear are the deeds.

Birds beasts to munis fearless come,
From hunter they in terror run.
Thus good and bad e'en birds beasts know,
In men wisdom and qualities flow.

Brother I know your nature well,
But mind doth in perplexion dwell.
King love denied his words to keep,
Then love to prove his death did greet.

In faith I would not fail his words,
But your deep love my heart has stirred.
Guru commands your wishes pure,
So what you say I'll do for sure.

Be pleased in heart, with mind unvexed, your wishes now declare,"
These words of Rama, who Truth upholds, thrilled all assembled there. 264

Bharat stood wrapt in deep thought. He was convinced that Rama would do what he desired him to do. Then he firmly decided that Rama's will should be his pleasure. Folding his hands, Bharat then said: 266

"Sure of your love I'm not depressed,
Lord! now I wait your kind behest.
Knowing that guru and you are pleased,
The torment in my heart has ceased

I had no cause in grief to sway,
'Tis not sun's fault one loses way.
By mother's vice my heart was sad,
It was God's Will, our days were bad.

The Fates conspiring, anguish gave,
Your Causeless Mercy does me save.
Lord! this is nothing great for you,
Your Love Infinite, Vedas knew.

All may turn foes but with your grace,
Who can misfortune ever face?

Like tree Divine your nature is,
Bestowing on all its love and bliss.

Seeking its shade, faith in your grace, people get peace of mind,
Beggar or king, wicked or good, who seek with faiths do find. 267

With guru's blessings, your love's bliss,
No doubts remain, gone has anguish.
Now Lord command as you are pleased,
Mind towards your devotees eased.

Devotee who does Lord compel,
To seek his gains, in vice does dwell.
Your return is our gain indeed.
But much more is your will to heed.

Detachment is of Self, the root,
Adorning faith, good actions' fruit.

To one request, Lord, mercy show,
What you decide, then let us know.
To enthrone you, O Lord we seek,
Grant us this prayer, humble and meek.

To forests send Satrughan and me, and make Ayodhya bloom again.
If you cannot return O Lord, send Lakshmana back let me remain. 268

Or three of us may go to woods.
With Sita return for our good.
Whatever Lord, your mind may ease,
Command O Rama do as you please.

O Lord! you ask me to decide,
Can I by custom, dharma abide?
In me does selfish love arise,
Discernment grieving heart denies!

Who questions what you have ordained,
For such a one Shame is ashamed.
I'm steeped in sin like ocean deep,
Of my devotion yet you speak!

Out of your pleasure what you say, O Lord we will all gladly do.
Your mercy shall save us from grief, nothing Lord shall we ever rue." 269

The gods were delighted hearing Bharat's words. They hailed his name and showered flowers from the heavens. There was an ominous silence in

the assembly. What would Rama decide? Whether joy would be in the lot of the people of Ayodhya with the return of their beloved monarch to their kingdom, or would sages in the woods of Chitrakoot have the rapture of beholding the wondrous form of the Lord and of listening to his words of wisdom?

All eyes were turned towards Rama.

34. THE MEETING IN THE FORESTS (Continued)

IV. King Janaka Arrives

Hearing Bharat's words full of devotion, Rama vacillated between the conflict of his love for him and fulfilment of words pronounced by King Dashratha. While the assembly silently awaited further developments, messengers of King Janaka arrived. Vashist was surprised at the sudden appearance of the king's men and enquired after his welfare. The messengers then narrated how King Janaka after hearing of King Dashratha's demise and Rama's banishment, had sent spies to Ayodhya to gather information. And so, King Janaka decided to come to Chitrakoot to meet Rama and Bharat in the forests. He would soon be arriving with Queen Sunaina and his retinue. 271

Next morning the king arrived. Rama bowed to him respectfully and then paid obeisance to sage Shatananda. King Janaka offered his condolences on the death of King Dashratha and paid glowing tributes to the noble king. The visitors from Mithila then took their bath in the river. As a mark of respect to the memory of the departed king everyone fasted that day.

Next morning Vashist apprised King Janaka of the talks that had been held. The king thereafter conferred with ministers and sages seeking to find some plan acceptable to Rama and the others. Meanwhile the queens met separately. Mother Kaushilya addressed the assembled ladies.

Kaushilya all the queens did greet,
With honour led them to their seats.

Seeing love each for the other felt,
Even the hardest steel would melt.
Tẹars in all eyes, forms anguish bound,
All lost in thought, toes scraping ground.

Like Sita Rama's love's image forlorn,
As if Grief grieved in many forms.
Said Sita's mother: "Strange God's Will,
That seeks to pierce foam by chisel.

Of nectar one doth only hear, poison is witnessed all around,
Crows owls and cranes seen everywhere, swans only in Lake Manas
found." 281

Sumitra said o'ercome with woes,
"God's Will perplexing and opposed,
the world doth create and then erase,
Like child forsooth aimlessly plays."

"None should be blamed," Kaushilya spoke,
"Pleasure and pain depend on Fate;
God knows relentless Destiny's course
Of fruit of actions He is source.

As God commands all is on earth,
Nectar, poison, life death and birth.
Futile it is to grieve O queens,
God's Maya is endless, Supreme.

Our grief on death of king, O friends,
Is prompted by our selfish ends."
Sunaina said: "True, wise your words,
O queen of king who good deeds earned."

Grieving in heart Kaushilya said: "My thoughts in Bharat dwell.
With Lakshmana Sita Rama in woods, I'm sure all will be well. 282

By Grace of God and blessings yours,
Like Ganga sons, their brides, are pure.
I've never sworn upon Rama's Name,
But today I firmly proclaim:

E'en Saraswati cannot fully trace,
Nature of Bharat, virtue, grace,
For brother: love devotion deep,
Can shell to empty ocean seek ?

Of Raghu's clan, Bharat is light,
The king had said this with delight.
By jeweller gems, gold by touchstone,
So in such times is nature known.

But such words seem not right today,
Love, sorrow makes discernment sway."
Like Ganga pure hearing her words,
Queens in love's anguish were bestirred.

Kaushilya said, calming her heart: "Mithila's Queen I beseech!
Learning's Abode's beloved spouse, to you how can I preach!

Queen! some occasion try to find,
To king explain from your own mind:
Send Lakshmana home, Bharat to woods,
If this proposal he thinks good

With earnest thought to find a way.
My heart in Bharat's state I lay.
Deep love for Rama in him abides,
How will his heart at home reside?"

Seeing simple nature and love deep,
In touching pathos queens were steeped.
Gods hail! flowers cascade from the sky.
In love's spell bound all yogis lie.

Amongst the queens silence had spread,
Sumitra calmly thus then said:
"Queen! night now ends its second part."
Kaushilya rose, love filled in heart.

"Your love o'erwhelms me gracious queens, let us retire, our limbs to rest,
God is our hope and King Janaka, alone can help us in our quest." 284

Seeing Kaushilya's love, gentle speech,
Janaka's beloved clasped her feet.
"Your thoughts behove your nature calm,
You're Dashratha's queen, mother of Rama!

For all life born on earth God fends,
E'en fire holds smoke, mountains grass tend.
Our king serves you mind action speech,
Shiva Parvati to help e'er reach.

To help you who can claim the might?
Can candle to the sun show light?
God's work, to live in woods Rama brings,
Then he shall be Ayodhya's king.

Gods, nagas munis, by might of Rama,
Shall in their kingdoms live unharmed;
This Yagyavalka muni had foretold,
The future his words shall unfold."

Thus said Sunaina, then she asked if Sita she could take,
The queens took leave, with Sita left for their own camping place. 285

Sita greeted her relatives but it pained them to see her dressed as a hermit.

Meanwhile King Janaka also took leave of sage Vashist and came to his camp to rest for the night. He was wrought with deepest love when he saw his darling daughter with her mother. He hastened to meet Sita:

He clasped his daughter to his heart,
Of his pure love and soul a part.

Ocean of love in his heart swelled,
Like Prayag in his heart beheld;
Her love Divine Akshaywat seemed,
Pure love for Rama upon which gleamed.

Like Markandeya as if he drowned,
But in Rama's love support he found.
Janaka was not attachment lost.
In Sita Rama's devotion tossed!

By love of parents overwhelmed, Sita could not herself contain,
But conscious of her dharma and time the Earth's daughter herself restrained. 286

Seeing Sita as a hermit dressed,
With love Janaka her thus addressed:
"Daughter! of families both you're pride,
Your sparkling deed shines far and wide!

O'er Ganga's waters thy fame glows,
It tracts hallows, thou world hallows!
Three holy shrines Ganga has made,
Thy glory world o'er temples makes!"

In feelings true Janaka voice raised,
But Sita blushed as she was praised.
The queen Sita to bosom pressed,
With deepest love her daughter blessed.

Sita stood still in turmoil wrought,
'Midst mothers night should be spent not.
Her wish to mother did impart,
She praised her darling in her heart.

Repeatedly the king and queen embraced Sita who then departed,
The wise queen seeing propitious time, Bharat's state to the king imparted. 287

Hearing of Bharat's nature pure,
Of golden glow and nectar's lure.

Enraptured king closed eyes tearfilled,
Praised Bharat, heart with rapture thrilled.

'O beauty of lovely eyes! heed!
From earthly bonds free Bharat's deed.
Of Bramha's wisdom, statecraft and dharma,
Some knowledge to my mind has come,

His deeds by knowledge to conceive,
E'en their shadow cannot perceive.
Saraswati, Brahma, Ganesha Mahesha,
The learned sages, poets and Shesha,

Find peace dwelling on Bharat's Name,
His glory, grace, deeds, dharma and fame.
Nature pure as Ganga renowned,
Its sweetness would nectar denounce.

In Bharat all qualities abide, he has no equal on the earth,
Can mount Sumera ever be weighed? In art of poets there is dearth. 288

His love to fathom vain to try,
Like fish to live upon earth dry.
Bharat's noble and supreme state,
Rama knows, but He cannot relate.

Of Bharat's fame spoke king love urged,
Then said knowing thoughts in queen's heart surged,
"For Lakshmana home, for Bharat woods,
Is best for them, for all is good.

But Rama and Bharat's faith and love,
Are from mind's reach, wisdom above.
Rama is limit of tranquill thought,
Bharat's limits of Love are wrought.

Of Beyond, comforts selfish means,
Bharat ne'er thinks even in dreams.
In Rama's Feets' Love his discipline lies,
The only principle of his life.

Bharat never, even by chance, opposes Rama's Love in his mind,
Therefore be not perplexed by love, a way to woe we will find." . 289

35. THE MEETINGS IN THE FORESTS (Continued)

V. King Janaka Confers With Bharat

Next morning visitors in both the camps from Ayodhya and Mithila took

their baths in the holy river and prayed to the gods. Rama went to sage Vashist and after bowing to him said: "Sire, Bharat, the people of Ayodhya and the queen mothers are sorely distressed and are being put to great inconvenience in the woods. King Janaka and the people from Mithila are also being put to hardship. I beseech you to take some decision regarding their departure."

Vashist praised Rama for his concern for welfare of the people and indicated that he would ascertain the wishes of King Janaka.

The king of Mithila was moved with emotion when he knew of Rama's message. Knowledge and detachment, of which the great king was an emblem, forsook him and he was lost in deep thought. "Alas!" he said to himself, "I did not act wisely in coming to the woods. The noble king Dashratha sent Rama to the woods and gave his life on separation from him; I shall return to Mithila after sending Rama deeper into the woods and yet will keep my life out of discernment!"

King Janaka then desired to meet Bharat in an effort to arrive at some decision acceptable to all. When all had assembled, Janaka said: "Son! You know the nature of Rama. He is the emblem of truth and dharma. He is gentle and hearkens to his devotees. Now speak of your desires and what you would like to be conveyed to Rama."

Bharat heard the king with deep respect and folding his hands in greetings, addressed the assembly: 292

Tears in his eyes, in rapture deep,
Calming his heart, Bharat did speak:

"Like my own father you are sire,
Guru's place more than parents higher;
Vishwamitra, sages, here abide,
You, learned sire, are by my side;

A child, O king, take me to be,
On path of dharma, O sire, guide me.
Midst wise, you ask me what I seek,
To speak is madness, silence cheek.

Bold are my words for my young age,
Forgive me, against me is Fate,
The Vedas, Puranas and Shastras say;
Hard is dharma of devotion's way.

Self love, devotion, conflict find,
Faith learning lacks, self love is blind.

Pray ask me not O learned sire, of dharma and Truth keeping in mind.
Desires of Rama and our welfare, consider for a way to find." 293

King Janaka and the entire assembly lauded Bharat. Few were the words he had spoken but they were full of wisdom but yet elusive in comprehension of his own heart's desire.

36.THE MEETINGS IN THE FOREST(Continued)

VI. The Final Meeting

The assembly had heard Bharat in silence. King Janaka then suggested that the views of everyone now being known, they may apprise Rama of the various proposals and take a decision on their future course. Led by King Janaka the assembled sages, ministers and Bharat proceeded to Rama.

The gods were filled with anxiety. Indra declared that Rama is won over by Love and humility. We must contrive to dissuade him by Maya's spell otherwise our mission will not be fulfilled. 294

The god, Indra appealed to Saraswati to delude Bharat from his unswerving devotion for the sake of their cause. Saraswati smiled and said: "Even with your thousand eyes you do not perceive Bharat's firm devotion: lofty as Mount Sumera itself! Even the Maya of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha cannot cast a glance at Bharat's wisdom. Can moonbeams prevail over the brilliant rays of the sun?"

Meanwhile all had assembled before Rama and sage Vashist addressed the assembly. He narrated the substance of the talks which had been held between King Janaka, Bharat and the sages; he also appraised the assembly of the proposals of the queens and with Bharat's views. He then requested Rama to indicate what he desired.

The gracious Rama looked tenderly towards Bharat. "O sage" he then said turning towards Vashist, "you are wise and learned. The great and noble King Janaka is also in our midst. I give my word, O sage, I will do what you and the king advise".

All eyes were now turned to Bharat. Vashist affectionately asked him to speak. 296

"O Lord Rama", he said "Out of deep attachment and ignorance I had come to ask you to set aside our father's words and return to Ayodhya for our selfish gains. I have persisted in my ignorance and you have tolerated my words.

Without guile and selfishness, without desire of the four fruits of life, may I be blessed with Your eternal devotion.

This is my only desire."

Bharat broke down as he spoke these words. Vashist lovingly solaced him while the assembly waited in silence for the Lord to speak. Gods in heaven shuddered for their fate lest overwhelming love for Bharat make

the Lord return to Ayodhya.

The Gracious Lord, Rama spoke words full of affection for Bharat, his dear brother and dedicated devotee:

"You're dharma's upholder" Rama then said,
"You are with Veda's true knowledge blessed.

In mind and action and in speech, none is like you my brother,
At such a time amidst sages, how can I praise my younger. 304

Of worldly customs, father's fame,
His love for Truth, you keep his name.
Respect for people, sages, times,
Of friends and foes, you know all minds.

You know what actions should be done,
What's good for us and every one.
In your decision I have faith,
Yet hear my words and action take.

Bereft of shelter of the king,
Welfare guru alone can bring.
Without him family, kingdom, people,
Would be destroyed and in dust mingle.

Should heaven's sun set 'ere its time,
All will be sad, who will not pine ?
So was our father's death too soon,
But we are saved by guru's boon.

In regal work, prestige and wealth, in dharma and all you do,
Guru will help in every thing, good fortune come to you. 305

For all our people, you and me,
At home, in woods, strength he will be.
Guru's respect and elders' words,
Are like the power which holds the earth.

Brother! let us our course so plan,
To hold aloft name of our clan.
For success one who strives to aim,
This path brings welfare, fortune, fame.

Thus bear your grief with a calm mind,
To serve our people strength to find.
My sorrow has been shared by all,
On you separation's burden falls."

"Even knowing your tender heart", Rama continued, "I talk to you of separation. But in this tragic moment I depend upon you my brother."

Bharat found peace with his heart. His face blossomed forth and he no longer felt distressed in his mind. "I shall obey your commands" he said, "having earned the fruit of my life by obtaining your mercy."

37. FAREWELL TO THE VISITORS FROM AYODHYA AND MITHILA

Thus it was finally decided that Rama, Lakshmana and Sita would remain in the woods till the completion of Rama's period of exile. Bharat then said to Rama: "We had brought with us waters of holy rivers for your coronation ceremony. Command, O Lord, where should we consign them. I have also another desire dear unto my heart", continued Bharat in a gentle voice filled with emotion. "With your permission I would like to see the woods of Chitrakoot graced by you before I leave for Ayodhya." 307

Rama gladly permitted his beloved brother to go around the woods. "Visit sage Atri", he advised, "and dispose off the holy waters as directed by him."

Bharat went around the woods of Chitrakoot. He paid humble reverence to sage Atri and requested him for advice for disposal of the holy waters. "There is a famous well at the foot of this hill", said the sage. "Consign the sacred waters into this well for posterity. Henceforth this celebrated well will be known as Bharatkoop." 309

After consigning the waters in the well, Bharat visited the woods hallowed by Rama. He walked barefooted and Earth made its paths soft for him to tread. A gentle cool fragrant breeze blew and clouds shaded the way for him. For five days Bharat thus paid homage to the places sanctified by the presence of Rama. 312

On the sixth day King Janaka and Bharat, along with the people of Mithila and Ayodhya assembled in the morning. Rama hesitated in requesting his visitors in the woods to depart for their homes. Bharat, knowing his Lord's mind, respectfully bowed to Rama and gently spoke: "Lord! You have fulfilled all my desires. For me you have suffered yet have given me your love. Permit me now, lord, to take your leave. I shall serve Ayodhya for fourteen years till your return. Give me, O Lord, strength and your blessings to spend my days of loneliness with fortitude."

"Brother", said Rama gently to his beloved Bharat, "our guru Vashist and King Janak shall be your, mine and Ayodhya's welfare. When we have blessings of our guru, sage Vishwamitra and King Janaka, neither you nor I can suffer tribulation. For both of us, duty and dharma demand that we strive to fulfil the words spoken by our father. Respect commands of sage

Vashist, the queen mothers and our ministers and serve the people and kingdom with zeal and righteousness."

Rama solaced Bharat in many ways but Bharat stood by hesitantly, seeking from Rama something for the peace of his mind. Impelled by Bharat's devotion, Rama gave him his wooden sandals. Bharat was filled with happiness as he held them to his forehead hailing the name of his beloved brother.

The wooden sandals of the Lord,
Were for Ayodhya like two guards.
Like mantle of devotion deep,
Like Rama himself for Bharat's peace.

Like doors the kingdom to protect,
Like hands good actions to project.
With joy Bharat sandals received,
As if they Sita, Rama revealed.

As Bharat asked for leave to go, Rama clasped him to his heart,
The gods by guile contrived to make the people to depart. 316

No words can describe the touching emotions of their parting. In that moment of tender love, tears flowed from Rama's eyes.

Ministers prepared for the departure and the spell of deep love was broken. Bowing to the lotus feet of Rama and taking his permission, Bharat and Satrughan left. They embraced Lakshmana and touched the dust of Sita's lotus feet, earning from her, affectionate blessings.

Rama and Lakshmana then bowed to King Janaka. "Many were the hardships you have faced in the woods", Rama said respectfully, "give us your blessings now and be pleased to depart for Mithila."

The two brothers and Sita bade a respectful farewell to the queen mothers and to the sages from Ayodhya and Mithila.

Seated under the shade of a banyan tree, they saw their beloved ones depart with heavy hearts.

38. HOW BHARAT RULED AYODHYA

A four days' journey brought them to Ayodhya and King Janaka accompanied Bharat to his kingdom. For four days he stayed in Ayodhya and helped Bharat in making necessary arrangements for the administration of the kingdom. Thereafter he departed for Mithila.

Bharat conferred with his ministers and gave them their respective charges. He made necessary arrangements for the queen mothers and charged Shatrughan to look after the welfare and with other regal duties.

Thereafter he went to sage Vashist and bowing to him said: "Permit me,

O sage, to spend the days of Rama's banishment in austerities while I look after the welfare of the people of the kingdom."

Sage Vashist praised Bharat for his resolve. "What you do and say, O Bharat", said the sage, "shall become the essence of the path of Devotion for the attainment of salvation!"

Bharat took sage Vashist's advice and choosing an auspicious day,
Performing every regal rite, Rama's sandals on the throne he lay. 323

From Kaushilya he blessings sought,
From Rama's sandals he succour got.
In Nandigram in a hut he dwelt,
Holding dharma's banner in prayer knelt.

Like renunciant, his hair grown long,
On mats of reeds he sat forlorn.
In food and clothes and other ways,
Living like hermit spent his days.

No royal robes nor comforts sought,
Letting not enter e'en in thought.
In kingdom more than Indra's in fame,
Whose wealth put e'en Kuvera's to shame;
He lived in Rama, of desires free,
Like hovering bee in champa tree.

Bharat grew thinner day by day. He grew pale but within his heart his devotion for Rama waxed stronger and stronger.

Immersed in nectar of Rama's love, if Bharat had not taken birth,
Of penance, discipline, self-restraint, who would have shown the path on earth?
Who would have vanquished sorrow, pain, pride, passions by Devotion's grace?
In Kaliyuga, age of sins and vice, 'fore Rama who would have Tulsi place?
Tulsi, one who with reverence deep, hears and reflects on Bharat's Deeds,
From worldly passions shall be saved, and earn Love of Rama's Lotus Feet. 326

Thus ends Ayodhya Kanda
(The Book of Ayodhya)
The second book of
Ramacharitmanasa
which destroys all sins of Kaliyuga.

BOOK THREE

ARANYA KANDA

(The Book of Forests)

The Main Root of the Tree of Dharma, Moon for Discernment's Sea's delight,
Sun for ascetic's Lotus Bloom, who ends three pains, of darkness plight,
Storm Wind to clear Delusion's Cloud, of Blemish who removes the stain,
Bramha's clan's adornment, dear to Rama, I hail Lord Shankara's Holy Name. 1 Sl

Whose sky-blue Form is like rain clouds, in barks of trees His body dressed,
Whose arms sport bow and arrows sharp, a quiver to His waist-band pressed;
Whose eyes are like large lotus buds, hair piled upon His forehead lies.
I sing of Rama Who treads wood's paths, Sita and Lakshmana by his side. 2Sl

Uma! Rama's Qualities deep, munis saints dwell, Detachment find,
Foolish Attachment keep, who Rama opposed heed not Love's call. So

1. JAYANTA'S DISRESPECT TO SITA

After Bharat and King Janaka had left Chitrakoot with the people of the two kingdoms, Rama remained pensive for some time with rememberances of Bharat. Sita and Lakshmana solaced him, keeping his mind diverted from thoughts of Ayodhya, and Rama sought to forget the sad parting with Bharat by attending wholly on his beloved Consort Sita:

Garlands of blossoms sweet Rama made,
On Sita's form and body laid.
Upon her blushing face he gazed,
As warmth of love in her heart blazed.

Of Indra, Jayanta the foolish son.
To test Rama's might as crow did come.
As if a little ant would seek,
To reach the bed of ocean deep.

Near Sita's lotus feet he drew,
Pecking her toes away he flew.
As Rama saw Sita's foot which bled,
An arrow small of reed he sped.

The Gracious Rama who loves the meek, to every one does mercy bear,
'Gainst such a one by foolish guile, the vile Jayanta to sin did dare. 1

The arrow charmed behind him flew,
Fear in fleeing Jayanta then grew.
To Indra in his true from he came,
No help he got for deed of shame.

Trembling with fear all hope he lost,
Like Durvasa by discus tossed.
In worlds of Shiva and Brahma he ran,
In helpless distress, bloodless, wan.

None gave Jayanta even a seat,
How can Rama's sinner mercy meet ?
For such, like death parents wrath burns,
Sweet nectar into poison turns.

For him his friend becomes a foe,
Ganga turns in Vaitarni's flow.
Against Rama thus who turns his mind,
World hotter than a flame does find.

Seeing Jayanta in deep anguish reel.
Narada for him did pity feel;
He sent him to Rama's mercy seek,
"Save me O Lord!" he did beseech.

Perplexed in fear he clasped His Feet,
"O Lord Thy Mercy I entreat!
Thy dazzling power and glorious might,
I could not in my folly sight.

For my great sin Thy wrath was meet,
Now grant me shelter of Thy Feet!"
His prayer the Lord of Mercy heard,
He lost the eye that sin incurred.

Who can be as Merciful as Rama? Jayanta had sinned against the Lord himself, but by His Infinite Mercy, he who deserved death was forgiven by Rama! 2

2. RAMA LEAVES CHITRAKOOT; FAREWELL TO SAGE ATRI

The Lord dwelt in Chitrakoot for some time but discovered many people arrived at his ashram, in the hope of seeing him and this made life as a hermit impossible. Rama therefore decided to leave Chitrakoot and take abode in some other forest.

Leaving their ashram of Chitrakoot, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita went to the ashram of sage Atri to bid him farewell. The sight of the Lord, His Divine Consort and brother Lakshmana gave the sage Atri divine pleasure. He escorted them to his ashram and placed before them offerings of choicest fruits. Folding his hands in reverent prayer, he sung to the glory of the Lord: 3

Hail to Thee O Merciful Rama!
Devotees Lover; tender, calm.
I hail the Glory of Thy Feet,
Granter of Bliss to those who seek!

Eternal Beauty! Blue like sky!
Like lotus bloom Thy graceful eye.
Mandrachal for ocean of life,
Redeemer of pride, woes and strife!

Vast is the power of Thy arm,
Thou Saviour of three worlds from harm!
Sporting Thy quiver, arrows, bow.
Thou makest hearts of saints aglow.

Thou jewel of the Solar race,
To string Shiva's bow who hands did brace!
Of sages and munis delight,
Gods foes and demons come to fight.

Worshipped by Shiva, the foe of Kama,
Bramha and the gods respect Thee Rama!
Abode of Knowledge and all things,
Power that destruction to vice brings.

O Lakshmi's Lord! Thy Feet I greet!
The hope of saints! the mine of peace!
Who once came as the Vaman frail,
With Sita, Lakshmana, Thee I hail!

The mortal ones who pride forsake,
Their aim service of Thy Feet make;
Do not in life's seas toss about,
carried by lashing waves of doubt;

In solitude who *moksha* to seek,
Their mind in Thy worship fixed keep;
Of sense pleasures who curb the urge,
In Thy Eternal Form they merge!

O Thou Unknown! Eternal! All!
Beyond Maya and qualities call!
Desireless! All Pervading One!
Guru and Lord! Of Thyself come!

To those of virtue ever kind,
Who those attached can never find;
For Thy devotee Blissful tree,
Justice Divine, All hail to Thee!

O Lord of Beauty! Lord of earth!
Lord of Sita, daughter of earth!
Be pleased on me Lord, I entreat,
Grant me devotion of Thy Feet!

Thus did the sage beseech the Lord. Bowing to Rama and folding his hands he respectfully said: "May my mind for ever be engrossed in Your Lotus Feet." 4

Sita then bowed to Anusuya, wife of the sage. She blessed Sita and gave her a seat by her side. Pleased by her deep devotion, Anusuya presented her with dazzling garments and ornaments which would for ever remain new and gave her blessings of eternal beauty. While Sita sat next to her, she explained to her the dharma of womankind.

Anusuya said: "One's parents' love
Cannot o'er husband's be above,
His love the highest bliss imparts.
From service erring wife departs.

Calmness and dharma, one's wife and friend,
Are known when grief one has to fend.
A husband lacking speech or sight,
Poor or unlettered, or in plight;

If spurned by erring haughty wife,
For sins she suffers in next life.
To love in action, speech and mind,
Is duty, dharma of womankind.

Of faithful wives there are four ways,
Thus Vedas and Puranas teaching says:

First woman who so chaste in heart,
Thinks of none else, husband apart.

Next those for whom husbands of others,
Are like father, sons or their brothers.
Next those who faithful to husband remain,
Restraining passion in *dharma's* name,

The last are faithful only because,
They lack the means afraid to be caught.
Deceiving her husband the adulterous wife,
Languishes in hell for her sinful life.

Eternal agony for a moment's pleasure,
Her vice extreme, she is lost for ever.
The faithful woman, devoted and meek,
Salvation earns without having to seek.

But the faithless woman who husband deceives,
The curse of being widow in future receives.

"Passions pervade a woman's body" continued Anusuya, "but engrossed in dutiful love for her husband she attains the highest bliss. Aye, even today, the glory of Vishnu's regard for Tulsi, as sung in the Vedas, shines with dazzling lustre." 5a

Anusuya then blessed Sita saying: "You shall be the ideal of womanhood, and your name shall be taken by all women who aspire for highest fidelity ot their husbands." 5b

Rama then requested the saint to give him leave to proceed to some other forest to spend the days of his exile. "Bestow your kindness upon me" said Rama, "and grant me your affections."

The sage gazed upon the Lord with tear filled eyes. "Lord!" he exclaimed, in voice filled with emotion, "how can I ask you to depart. You know all hearts! Blessed is my fate that I have looked upon the Lord who is beyond intellect, knowledge, qualities and senses!

Knowledge of Subtle Truth who keep,
Bramha, Shiva Sanakadi, Thy Mercy seek;
Yet Thou art also Lord of Meek,
For selfless men, Thy Gracious speech.

I now know Lakshmi's wisdom deep,
Who left all gods Thy Form to keep;
In all qualities supreme Thy place,
How can Thee not have Benign Grace?

How can I say: 'Lord you may go'
Tell me my Lord, all hearts you know!"
Thus said the sage and Rama beheld,
Enthralled his form, in eyes tears welled.

Heart fixed in love, body enthralled, on Lotus Form eyes steady holds,
Thinks sage: 'Which prayer penance I did, Lord Beyond Qualities to behold!'
Gift of devoted love to get, with yoga and dharma to Thee men pray,
Tulsi, devoted in the Lord, Pure Deeds of Rama sings night and day.
Rama's Glory is Root of Welfare, sins in Kaliyuga to burn,
Those who hear wondrous Deeds with faith, His Benign Pleasure earn. 6a
Of sins Kaliyuga is age, dharma wisdom penance are no more,
Who hope have none Rama save, they are the wise, to Him they pray.
6b So

3. RAMA RESOLVES TO RID EARTH OF FEAR OF DEMONS

Bidding farewell to sage Atri Rama journeyed into the woods with Sita and brother Lakshmana. While on their way, Viradh the formidable demon, confronted them. Rama slew the demon and as he lay dying, he assumed his real form. Rama granted him His own abode.

Soon they reached the ashram of sage Sharbhanga. The sage gazed on the wondrous beauty of the Lord. 7

The sage exclaimed: "O Raghuvira kind!
O swan in lake of Shiva's mind!
To go to Brahma's world as I stood,
I heard in forests come you would.

Since then I wait here day and night,
My heart gets peace now by your sight.
No disciplines, lord, are in my lot.
You have on me your mercy wrought.

To me no favour do you seek,
Tempter of saints! Your vow you keep!
Now for my sake a moment stay,
Till from this form I pass away."

All prayers and fasts, disciplines made,
The sage for Rama's devotion laid.
Leaving all hopes the sage lived by,
He sat entranced, prepared to die.

"O Gracious Rama of Saguna form, of lovely hue like rain clouds blue,
With Lakshmana, Sita by you side, in heart abide I beseech you!" 8

Thus prayed the sage before the Lord and renouncing his life was borne to the heavens.

The assembly of saints sung to the glory of the Lord and accompanied Rama on his journey into the forests. As he went along the forest paths he saw human bones strewn amongst the thickets. "Lord", said the saints with a heavy heart in reply to Rama's enquiries, "demon hosts have devoured saints and have thrown their bones into the jungles. You know, O Merciful Lord, our sorrows and travails. We dare not pray, nor make offerings to the gods for fear of death at the hands of the terrible demons."

Rama was sorely distressed on hearing of the persecution wrought by demons. His heart was filled with mercy and his eyes brimmed with tears at the incidents related by the saints.

Rama raised his hands and spoke firmly to the saints: "Fears not, O saints! I shall rid the earth of the menace of demons!"

Rama then visited ashrams of many sages, bearing to them the message of his resolve and solacing them with words of peace. 9

4. RAMA MEETS SUTIKSHANA

As Rama proceeded in to forests, Sutikshana a disciple of the great sage Agastya heard of the advent of Rama in the woods. Sutikshana was a devotee of Rama in mind in, action and in speech. Even in dreams he had no other attachments.

Sutikshana hastened to meet Rama. "Will the Lord meet me as His devotee?" He pondered, "I have no learning nor have I engaged myself in penances. Yet I have one hope! The Lord loves those who seek no shelter other than His Divine devotion. Ah! I will gaze upon His Wondrous Form to my heart's content!"

Meanwhile Rama, as he came along the forest path, saw the sage coming towards him in rapturous ecstasy. While he was yet behind some trees, he manifested his form in Sutikshana's heart.

The sage stood entranced. He stood like a statue and the hair of his body bristled as he was lost in deepest ecstacy. Seeing his profound devotion Rama came up to him and spoke gently to the enraptured saint.

But Sutikshana moved not, neither did he speaks, so full was he of Divine Bliss beholding the Wondrous Form of Rama within his heart. Rama then withdrew his princely form and gave him the vision of His Divine Form.

As the Merciful Form of Rama faded out of his heart, the sage writhed in anguish as a snake on losing its 'mani'. He opened his eyes and beheld

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita standing before him! The sage fell to the ground and clasped the Feet of the Lord. Raising him with deepest love, Rama clasped him to his heart.

The sage then bowed to the Lord and escorted him to his ashram. After reverence to Rama he addressed him: 10

"How may O Lord to Thee I pray?"
The noble saint to Rama did say.
"Wisdom I lack, great is Thy might,
Like glow worm and the bright sunlight.

Thy Form like lotus blue blooms fresh,
Matted hair: crown; hermit's Thy dress.
Quiver at waist, bow in Thy hand,
To greet Thee Lord, I humbly stand.

The flame that burns attachment's wood,
The sun that bloom hearts of the good.
To demons: lion for elephant herds,
Eagle to end life cycles birds.

Garuda for snakes of earthly doubts,
Thou end of sorrows brings about.
Thy Grace from life cycles doth free,
O Lord of Mercy, shelter me!

O Nirguna! Saguna! Beyond reach!
Above all Knowledge, sense and speech!
Eternal! Peerless! Perfect! Great!
Thou earth redeems! On Thee I wait!

For saints Thou art wish granting tree,
From pride, lust, anger Thou doth free.
Thou are the bridge to cross life's span.
Save me, O Lord! Flag of Surya's clan!

Abode of strength! Thy arms might wend,
By Thy Name sins in Kaliyuga end.
Armour of Dharma! Granter of peace,
Save me O Lord, Thy Grace I seek!

Eternal! In all things Thou art!
Thou doth exist in mortal hearts.
As Thou with Sita woods adorn,
Within my heart I seek Thy Form.

Saguna or Nirguna who Thee sees,
Let him yearnings of his heart please.
But in my heart, O Lord, abide,
With Lakshmana Sita by Thy side."

"Never may the thought leave my mind", continued the sage, "that I am Thy devotee and Thou, O Lord, are my saviour!"

Rama clasped Sutikshana to his heart. "Know me to be pleased", said the Lord gently, "and ask for a boon of your desire."

"Lord" said the sage, "I know not what boon to ask. Give me O Merciful One, whatever Thou likes."

Said Rama: "O sage! Receive from me the boon of deepest devotion, detachment, understanding, good qualities and the treasure of knowledge!"

"Lord" said the sage, "what Thou hast bestowed upon me I have received. Now grant me also that for which I yearn. O Lord! O Rama! reside for ever with Sita and Lakshmana in my heart like the moon in the skies!" 11

"So shall it be!" said the Lord to his dear devotee, as they proceeded into the words.

5. RAMA MEETS SAGE AGASTYA

Rama then decided to visit the great sage Agastya in his ashram and seek his advice as to where he should spend the days of his banishment. Sutikshana also desired to accompany him and they set out together.

Soon they arrived at the ashram and Sutikshana went forward to inform the sage of their arrival. Agastya was delighted to hear of Rama's visit and he hastened to meet the two brothers. Rama and Lakshmana bowed to the sage's feet and he clasped them to his heart, and then escorted Rama, Lakshmana and Sita to his ashram. "Blessed indeed is my fate!" exclaimed the sage welcoming them and giving them seats of honour in his ashram. The assembled sages beheld in rapture the dazzling face of the Lord, like chakors gazing at the full moon. 12

"O sage", said Rama, respectfully to Agastya, "you know the reason for my faring into the woods. Everything is known to you! Advise me how I may rid the fears of sages and deliver them against persecution of demons."

The sage addressed Rama:

Agastya heard Rama, then smiled and said:
"To ask me, Lord, what thoughts you led?
Destroyer of sins! by your prayer own,
Some little of your power I've known!

Like fig tree is Your Maya's art,
Its fruit, the worlds in many parts.
Their insects small: life worlds contain,
Knowing not beyond, unseen remain.

Time unrelenting, on them feeds,
But Your commands Destiny seeks!
O Lord of Mercy! boon I ask,
Reside with Sita in my heart!

Grant me detachment, faith complete,
Saint's company, Love of Holy Feet!
Eternal and endless Thou art!
Known by experience in the heart!

Thy Form Unending though I know,
Preaching its Glory though I glow;
To Saguna Form I still return,
You ask to let me glory earn!

There is a place in woods of fame,
Panchvati, Lord, is its fair name.
The Dandaka forests, Lord, Thou grace,
Sage Gautam's curse from it efface."

Bidding the sage farewell, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita left for Panchvati. On their way they met Jatayu, the King of Birds, and conversed with him for sometime. Thereafter they reached the banks of the Godavari river. Building a beautiful hut there, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita resided in Panchvati in peace. 13

6.THE LORD AT PANCHVATI

In the peaceful and magnificent surroundings of Panchvati the Lord found relaxation and lived happily with Sita and his loving brother Lakshmana. Once Rama was sitting in his ashram gazing upon the beauty of His Maya. Lakshmana gently spoke to him: "O Lord! Master of all life, gods, humans and sages! Be pleased to instruct me, knowing me to be your humble devotee."

"O Lord! renouncing all how may I get,
Bliss of serving Thy Feet" Lakshmana said.
"Of Knowledge and of Maya let me know,
By Devotion to Mercy gate way show.

The difference between Ishwara Jiva, O Lord also explain,

Sorrow, attachment, doubts may flee, and Faith I may attain." 14

The Lord said: "I will briefly state,
Listen with care while I relate:
I and Mine; You, yours is Maya,
Which keeps us in delusion's mire.

Sense pleasures and mind's illusions,
These are all Maya's delusions.
Maya appears in two modes,
Of learning and its lack composed.

One is ignorance, root of sadness,
Keeping jiva in Maya's harness.
The other creates and qualities holds,
But lacking power, God's Will unfolds.

With Knowledge, no desires one feels,
All things on earth Brahma's Will reveals.
Renunciants like straw reject,
Three qualities and what they project.

Jiva is that which knows not Maya, Ishwara nor Itself can tell.
Ishwara, the personal god, which creates, preserves, ends Maya's spell. 15

Dharma brings detachment; Yoga; Knowledge,
Learning: moksha, the Vedas acknowledge.
But Devotion wins me with ease,
To My devotee I give peace.

Devotee is from effort freed,
Learning, knowledge he does not need.
Devotion, root of learning, peace,
Is earned by Faith which Me does please.

Path of devotion has few needs,
With ease devotee to me leads.
To saints his love he should impart,
Perform actions with righteous heart.

From sense pleasures he'll be detached,
Love for Me follows unattached.
By Faith nine learnings are attained,
In My creation, peace obtained.

Those loving saints without detraction,
Engrossed in mind and speech and action;

Father, husband, all in Me see,
Knowing Me as All, give all to Me;
Those who singing My hymns are thrilled,
Voices moved, eyes with tears are filled;

Those who touched not by lust or pride, strive not for worldly honour,
In my devotion who e'er live, such persons Me enamour.
In mind in action and in speech, those offering Me their lives,
Seeking naught but My Divine Grace, in such hearts I reside." 16

Thus did the Lord explain to Lakshmana the simple and glowing path of discipline of devotion. Moved by the rapture of devotion, he bowed to the Holy Feet of the Lord.

Rama spent his days in Panchvati happily in the company of his beloved Consort Sita and his dear devoted brother Lakshmana and their days of banishment gradually sped by.

7. SURPNAKHA DISFIGURED BY LAKSHMANA

Ravana had a sister named Surpnakha who was Evil. Once she happened to come to the forests of Panchvati and, beholding the beauty of the two handsome princes Rama and Lakshmana she desired them physically.

Adorning herself in a provocative manner, she smiled coyly at Rama, and softly told him that she yearned to marry him:

Surpnakha to Rama like a coquette went,
Smiling, she crooned in lust spent:
"No youth like you, no maiden like me,
I was born for you, and you for me!

None have I yet found who is fit for me,
All over the world I have been to see.
So though I am lovely, I'm single still,
But seeing you now, wed you I will!"

Glancing at Sita, Rama playfully said:
"My lonely brother may marry you yet!"
She was demon king's sister Lakshmana knew,
He said with his face towards Rama drew:

"I am only his servant, O lovely maid,
No leisure for love, on him do I wait.
My lord is mighty, he's Ayodhya's king,
'Tis within his power to do anything.

Pleasure for devotee; for beggar respect;
Moksha for the wicked; waster wealth to expect;
Four ideals for proud; fame for one of greed;
Such foolish ones vainly from sky milk seek!"

To Lord Rama Surpnakha again then came,
Rama to Lakshmana sent her back again.
Said Lakshmana in wrath: "Only he will you wed,
Who is shameless like you, by lust he is led!"

Insulted by Lakshmana to Rama then she went,
Assuming her real form, Sita to torment.
Seeing Sita frightened by her terrible form,
Rama motioned to Lakshmana to demoness warn.

Like lightning Lakshmana caught her, cutting her ears and nose,
By maiming Ravana's sister, daring might of their foes.
Humiliated and in pain, Surpnakha fled to her brothers Khara, Dushana and Trishira proclaiming vengance. 17

8. BATTLE AGAINST DEMONS IN DANDAKA WOODS

In agony, Surpnakha hastened to her brothers Khara, Dushana, Trishira who dwelt in the forests nearby. Seething with rage she hissed: "Brothers! Shame upon your valour! Shame upon your might of arms! See how your sister has been made to suffer in the woods in which you live!"

They asked her who had dared to disfigure her and she narrated how Lakshmana had cut off her ears and nose. The demons immediately summoned their commanders and ordered them to prepare to wage battle against the princes to avenge the insult to their sister.

Vast numbers of demons surged forward. They were of formidable stature and mounted on swift steeds. Carrying deadly weapons with them they rushed towards the ashram where Rama lived. The commanders of their armies were delighted to see their valiant warriors full of battle's zeal. "Let us capture the brothers!" some roared as they moved forward. "Let us kill them and capture their maiden!" others exclaimed.

When Rama heard the noise of the approaching demons and saw clouds of dust rising to the skies, he told Lakshmana: "Brother! the army of he demons approaches. Take Sita into yonder cave and look after her carefully. I shall deal with them!"

Obeying his Lord, Lakshmana picked up his bow and arrows, and departed with Sita into the cave.

Rama smiled as he saw the fiery demons approach. He tied his quiver

at his waist and picked up his wondrous bow. Stringing an arrow, he looked like a tiger preparing to encounter a herd of wild elephants.

With shouts of "Capture him!" the demons rushed towards Rama. But as Khara and Dushana beheld the Lord, they were struck by His dazzling beauty. They called their minister and said: "Amongst all the gods, sages, humans and asuras we have vanquished, never have we beheld such grace in any one. They have indeed insulted us by disfiguring our sister but this handsome prince does not deserve to die."

"Offer him terms of peace on the condition that he surrenders the maiden with him to us!"

When Khara, Dushana's ministers communicated this message to Rama, he smiled and said: "I an Kshattriya born. I travel in the woods looking for game like you. We are not afraid of our foes, howsoever mighty they may be. We would indeed fight even Death Itself. I have vowed to protect mankind against demons. If you are frightened, return home. I do not attack one who turns his back in battle!"

Hearing Rama's reply, Khara, Dushana blazed in fury:

Khara Dushana raged within their hearts: "Capture them, warriors!" then
they said,
Taking their bows axes and spears, towards Rama demons quickly sped.
Rama struck bow string as demons hied, all round a fearful sound it spread,
Then demons were taken aback, stopping in their tracks filled with dread.
Knowing strength of warrior whom they attacked then with care,
Many arrows and weapons sharp, they sped forth through the air.
With dextrous skill the valiant Rama destroyed their arms with ease,
Then stretching bowstring to the ear, his arrows sharp released.

The dreadful arrows swiftly sped,
Like snakes in air with hissing heads.
In battles valour Rama arose.
Stringing sharp arrows at his foes.

At Rama's swift arrows thus dismayed,
The demons turned death to evade.
Khara, Dushana, Trishira brothers three,
In anger bellowed: "Those who flee,

With our own hands we'll slay today!"
Knowing they would now die either way
The raging demons then turned back
With dreadful weapons to attack.

Seeing demons fierce in fury bent,
Rama fiery arrows quickly sent.

In all directions arrows sped,
The dreadful demons fell down dead.

Their bodies, limbs arms and heads,
Lay all around the forest spread.
Like elephants injured demons roared,
Like mountains were their bodies floored.

Their severed limbs lay on the ground,
Yet they fought on in fury bound.
Heads arms were seen flying in the air,
Yet headless, limbless, on they fared!

In dreadful fury battle blazed,
Crows eagles screeched and beasts flew dazed.

Ghosts fiends and spirits gathered bones, wails of jackals broke thickets' lull,
Witches danced wildly filled with glee to goblins beating time on skulls.
The fiery arrows aimed by Rama broke heads and chests as demons fell,
But drunk in lust of war they rose: "Capture him!", "Kill him", they did yell.
One end of entrails fiends grasped, the other vultures drew,
As if children of bottle-town, in air their red kites flew.
Hundreds of demons thus were killed, many in anguish lay,
Seeing their armies sorely oppressed, Khara, Dushana turned Rama's way.
In battle's fury then led, thousands of demons fierce.
Aiming at Rama arrows and axe, daggers, missiles and spears,
With dextrous ease the Lord destroyed the weapons they had sped,
Then throwing a challenge arrows aimed, ten for each one who led,
The leaders fell and rose again, fighting with wondrous skill,
Fourteen thousand against one Rama! the gods stood breathless still.
Then Mercy's Lord seeing gods in fear, displayed his battle's art,
Each demon seeing Rama before him, killing their own did start!

The demons shouted 'This is Rama! Here is Rama!' and they started attacking their own warriors by the hallucination created by Rama. One by one all the warriors were killed. The Name of Rama was upon lips of the demons as they died and the Merciful Lord granted them salvation.

The day's battle ended and the demons were vanquished. Gods were overjoyed and showered flowers from the heavens. Celestial music filled the air in rejoicings. Hailing the name of the Lord, gods who had assembled to witness the fierce battle left for their abodes. Humans and sages sung to the glory of Rama. Their fears had at last been destroyed.

Seeing that the battle had ended, Lakshmana brought Sita out of the cave. Overjoyed by the success of his Lord, Lakshmana fell to his feet. The Lord raised him affectionately and clasped him to his heart.

Sita gazed upon the gentle sky blue form of her beloved Lord. So filled was she with love; and she could not take her eyes away from his resplendent face.

The Lord then lived happily with Lakshmana and Sita at Panchvati, delighting sages and saints who visited him in his ashram.

9. SURPNAKHA'S COMPLAINT TO RAVANA

Dismayed by the death of her brave brothers Khara, Dushana and Trishira, Surpnakha hastened to her mighty brother Ravana in Lanka. She raged with fury as she saw him sitting in court, making merry with his ministers.

She spoke hot words in anger wrought :
"For kingdom, welfare, you care not!
'Midst wine and women day and night,
You know not enemies come to fight!

Unrighteous wealth, kingdom uncared,
Good actions not to God declared;
Learning without discernment sought,
Result in labour set at naught.

By flattery kings, by comforts saints,
Knowledge by pride, wine virtue taints.
By harshness love, by ego learning,
Dwindle in strength say the discerning.

Disease and fire, foe, sin and snake, though small are not neglected!"
Thus Surpnakha sighed long and aloud, and fell on knees dejected.
Imploring help in Ravana's court, she wept and thus did wail: 21a
"O warrior great! Ten headed king! let me not bear travail!"

The demons rose hearing her weep,
Beseeching her patience to keep.
Then Ravana said : "Speak! shed your fears,
Who dared to cut your nose and ears ?"

Lied she : "Rama, of King Dashratha, son
Tiger 'mongst men had hunting come.
To me such seemed to be his plan,
To wipe from world the demon clan.

Through him sages have shelter got,
They live in woods without a thought.

The demons flee from him in fright,
The brothers two are of great might.

In power and strength they are supreme.
The gods and sages they redeem.
Rama is his name, abode of grace,
His young wife has a dazzling face.

In her such charms has God endowed,
Crores of Ratis would stand bowed.
His brother struck me in wrath stirred,
When of your mighty name they heard.

Khara Dushana came to give me aid,
But soon lay dead their armies flayed."
Hearing Khara, Dushana, Trishira killed,
Ravana's body with fire was filled.

He solaced Surpnakha with many words and talked of his great valour,
But in his palace lay in thought, sleepless and in a pallor. 22

Thought he: ' 'Mongst gods, humans or beast,
My server none can hope to beat.
Khara Dushana like me warriors brave,
How could one slay, God Himself save!

Who world protects and gods delights,
If God Himself on earth alights;
I shall insist with Him to fight,
Salvation get by His bow's might!

In prayer my heart cannot abide,
So this in my mind I decide.
And if he's son of earthly king,
I'll vanquish him and his wife bring.'

Thus he spent the night lying uneasily in bed; sometimes yearning for the maiden; sometimes afraid of what he wished to do—wondering again and again as to how Khara, Dushana and Trishira could have been slain unless Rama was the Lord Himself. Yet he would not humble himself before the Lord, so mad was he of his lust and of his might.

10. RAMA ASKS HIS DIVINE CONSORT TO RESIDE IN FLAMES

The Lord knew that the arrogance of power would be the downfall of the demons. He would thus fulfil the purpose of His Divine Incarnation. Rama decided to part with His Divine Consort till he was engaged in bringing

about the destruction of vice.

When Lakshmana to the forest went to gather fruit for them to eat,
The Lord of Peace and Mercy smiled and to His Consort thus did speak: 23

"Listen my love, my faithful wife,
I'll do some deeds of human life.
I will destroy the demons claims,
Till then reside amidst the flames."

Hearing Lord Rama's Divine Desire,
Devoted Sita entered fire.
Her image by Rama's side took place,
As lovely, gentle, full of grace.

The secret of what Rama had done,
Was not known even to Lakshman.

11. RAVANA ASKS MAREECH TO TEMPT RAMA

Meanwhile, seething with fury at the humiliation Surpnakha had suffered, and maddened by his own wicked desires, Ravana mounted his chariot and hastened to Mareech who lived on the ocean's shore.

Mareech was surprised to see the demon king faring alone in the wilderness. Paying respects to Ravana he asked: "Brother! what distresses your mind and how do you fare alone and unattended today?" 24

Ravana told Mareech Rama's story,
And of his pride and own vain glory.
"Become a deer with a golden skin,
I seek the maid he has with him."

Mareech exclaimed: "O Ravana great!
Rama is king of the human race!
Quarrel not with him. O great sire,
At His Will rests the world entire.

O'er Vishwamitra's yagya he stood guard,
He struck me with an arrow hard.
A thousand miles away I lay,
Be wise! fight not with him, I pray!

My state is now like of a bee,
All around me, His Form I see.
E'en if human, he has great might,
I beg you Sire, him do not fight!

He killed Taraka and Subahu, and broke Shiva's mighty bow in two,
He slew Khara, Dushana and Trishira, such great might you cannot undo.
25

Return! save demons from his wrath!"
Hearing him Ravana blazed in heart.
"Fool! like a sage you give advice,
Can warrior like me ever rise?"

Mareech was in his heart resigned,
Vain was it to oppose these nine:
The Lord, the rich, the armed, the cook,
A doctor, poet, clown, fool or crook.

In both ways he foresaw his death,
The Lord's Shelter would be the best,
'Ravana will surely my limbs rend
Why not Rama's arrow be my end ?'

He went with Ravana thus resigned,
In Rama's Feet then heart consigned.
Happy the Lord would be revealed,
His joy from Ravana well concealed.

One the way Ravana gave him detailed instructions as to how he should act when he took the form of a deer by the power of his magic. Rama would be lured away into the thickets and he would stealthily go into his ashram, He cunningly formulated a plan to send Lakshmana also away as he knew that his wicked designs could not be accomplished as long as he was there to protect Sita.

Thus they approached the Dandaka woods where the Lord was residing peacefully with Sita and Lakshmana.

12. THE GOLDEN DEER

While Ravana disclosed his evil plan nurtured in his crafty mind to Mareech they reached the Dandaka woods. Mareech was overjoyed at the thought of seeing the Lord and he was oblivious of the tragedy which would be of his making. "I will behold the Beloved Lord", he thought to himself, "and concentrate in the Lotus Feet of Divine Mother Sita and Lakshmana, the greatest of all devotees! Lord Rama, the Ocean of Bliss. Whose wrath even gives salvation and Whose devotion brings within reach the Immanent God, shall follow me with bow and arrow in His Lotus Hands! None will be more blessed than me!" 26

As he was in this rapturous state, Ravana whispered excitedly that the ashram was nearby.

The ashram where Rama dwelt drew near,
Mareech took form of a wondrous deer.
No words its beauty can unfold,
Its jewel studded coat of gold!

When Sita saw the glittering deer,
Of graceful body, beauty sheer;
She said: "Darling! that deer we see,
O bring its lovely skin for me!"

Rama knew the wicked Ravana's scheme,
Yet rose the gods fears to redeem,
Stringing an arrow to his bow.
He told Lakshmana; "Brother I go;

But guard our ashram with all care,
In forests mighty demons fare.
Look after Sita till I come,
See that to her no harm is done!"

As Rama with bow and arrow stood,
The deer ran swiftly to the wood.
To whom Shiva prays, Whom Vedas know not,
That Rama chased deer of Maya wrought!

Sometimes a far and sometimes near,
He ran as if of Rama had fear.
Thus filled with wiles the golden deer,
Pursued by Rama would hide, appear!

At last ended the Divine Chase,
Rama's arrow struck as he slowed pace.
The dying deer then Lakshmana named,
Rama's Form in his heart then contained.

Mareech forsook his form of charm,
In deep respect he bowed to Rama.
Devotees heart the Lord knew well,
To His Abode sent him to dwell!

The gods showered flowers from above, their hands in rapture raised,
For Rama Who sheltered a demon, such Benign Lord they praised! 27

13. SITA IS KIDNAPPED BY RAVANA

Sita watched Rama following the deer fleeting away into the thickets. As time went by she was anxious for his welfare. Suddenly, she heard Lakshmana's name being voiced in the distant woods. The voice seemed

to be that of Rama and by its anguished tone Sita felt that he was in trouble.

As Sita meek, Lakshmana's name heard,
She cried in anguish, deeply stirred:

"Go quickly! distressed calls your brother!"
Said Lakshmana smiling: "Holy Mother!
Whose arched brows could the world's end be,
Can that Rama ever distress see?"

When Sita spoke some bitter words,
With pain Lakshmana's faithful heart stirred.
Leaving her alone in gods' care,
To seek Rama in the woods he fared.

When Sita was by herself left,
Ravana in form of saint came dressed.
The demon who kept gods in fear,
Awake, hungry, lest he appear.

That warrior king, afraid, like thief,
Warily, like a dog did creep.
Bad actions when one contemplates,
Wisdom and strength his mind forsakes.

To win her, Ravana in his pride,
With lure of wealth, love and fear tried.
Sharply said Sita: "Foolish saint,
Your words are both wicked and quaint."

His mighty form then Ravana showed,
In wrath aroused, his name disclosed.
She firmly spoke, with her heart calm,
"Wait wicked demon, soon comes Rama!

As if a rabbit fawn would woo,
So demon king your doom seek you!"
Hearing Sita's words of contempt,
Ravana was filled with vile intent.

Burning with rage he seized Sita and captive made the damsel frail,
He drove his chariot swiftly then but was himself with terror pale. 28

Grief stricken Sita wailed in distress. "Oh peerless warrior of the world!" she wept, "for what fault of mine have you forgotten me? O Redeemer of sorrows! Bestower of peace upon those who seek Thy Mercy! O sun of the lotus clan of Raghu! Why hast thou forsaken me? O

Lakshmana! it was not your fault! I bear the sorrow of my wrath. Great indeed is the Mercy of my lord! But far away is my Beloved now. Who will narrate my woes to him ? O Fate! A wretch seeks to defile the offering for the Lord!"

Sita wept pathetically. All who saw the speeding demon stood by in silent grief. Then Jatayu, the King of Birds, saw Sita and recognized her as the Consort of Rama. "O daughter" he exclaimed, "do not despair. I shall destroy this vile demon!"

Jatayu sped towards Ravana as lightning strikes a hill. "Halt O wicked demon!" he challenged. "How dare you proceed so fearlessly?"

Ravana turned around and saw Jatayu approaching him with lightning speed, like Death Itself. "This must indeed be Mount Mainak, or else Jatayu, the King of Birds. But Jatayu knows the might of my arms. How dare he challenge me!"

As Jatayu came nearer, Ravana recognised him. "O old Jatayu!" he mocked, "seek you death at my powerful hands!"

"Hearken Ravana!" Jatayu warned in anger, "let Sita go and return in peace to your own abode. Otherwise your whole family shall burn like moths in the flames of Rama's fiery wrath."

Ravana stood proudly defiant without speaking a word. Jatayu then flew at Ravana and threw him from his chariot. Swiftly he attacked the great demon king, wounding him grievously with his beak till Ravana fell to the ground.

Tormented by rage, Ravana unsheathed a sharp dagger and cut off Jatayu's wings. The great and noble bird fell to the earth, vanquished by the mighty demon king.

Ravana sped away with Sita, and shed tears of distress. Ravana took Sita to his kingdom in Lanka. He tried to force her to accept him and be his queen. Sita shunned him in contempt. Fuming, Ravana kept her confined in the Ashoka gardens as a captive till she would relent and bow to his will. But Sita gladly accepted tribulations with fortitude and did not even deign to glance at the wicked demon king. 29a

Sita recalled the image of Rama as he chased the golden deer. She kept this image in her heart and incessantly repeated the Holy Name of Rama. 29b

Demonesses, fierce and terrible, kept guard over her night and day, as she was placed under solitary confinement.

14. RAMA GRIEVES FOR SITA

After slaying Mareech Rama turned back towards his ashram. He saw Lakshmana coming towards him and was anxious for Sita's welfare. "Brother!" he exclaimed, "you have disobeyed my commands by leaving

Sita alone. The woods are full of demons. Something tells me that all is not well with her."

Lakshmana clasped the feet of his Lord. "I am blameless" he sighed and explained the circumstances in which be had to leave Sita and set out to look for him.

To the ashram by Godavari's side,
The brothers two then quickly hied.
Like humans Rama there wept and pined,
When he sweet Sita did not find.

"O darling Sita!" he did wail,
"O gentle, pure of body frail!"
When Lakshmana with his love solaced,
Lord Rama His Maya thus addressed:

"O birds! O deer! O honeyed bees!
Have you seen fawn eyed Sita please?

Ah! parrots, thrushes, fish and deer,
Flying bees and cuckoos singing clear;
The pomegranate, jasmine's bloom,
Snakes gliding, lotus, lightning, moon;

The noose of Varuna, Kamadeva's bow,
The tiger, elephant and swan's glow:
Coconut, Champa, plantain trees,
Flaunt now in joy, their hearts at ease.

As if woods have your kingdom seized,
Your beauty gone they all look pleased.
This grief for me how can you see,
Why don't you, darling, come to me!"

Thus Rama wept for Sita distressed,
With passion, loneliness oppressed.
Eternal Rama! Peaceful! Unborn!
Fulfilment! acted like the born!

Thus did the Lord in his earthly role, like a human being, weep for his beloved Sita. The sorrowing brothers looked all over for her but in vain. They knew not whither to go or whom to ask news of her. They wandered aimlessly in the woods, hoping to find some clue of her whereabouts.

15. RAMA MEETS JATAYU

Leaving their ashram Rama, Lakshmana set out to look for Sita. On their

way they met Jatayu who lay writhing in agony with blood flowing out of his deep wounds. Rama lifted his head gently in his hands out of compassion for his anguish.

As Jatayu beheld Rama, he became free from pain. Calming his heart, he spoke gently to Rama: 30

Then said Jatayu with effort great :
"Lord! Saviour of what Thou creates!
Ravana's sword felled me in affray,
As he carried Sita away.

I saw him southward in sky sail,
In deep distress did Sita wail.
I live to enshrine You in heart,
Lord of Mercy! I now depart!"

Rama said: "My friend I grant you life."
The King of Birds said with a smile:
"A dying sinner by Thy Name
is freed for e'er from birth again;

The Bliss of Thy Form I behold,
For what more should I life now hold ?"
Said Rama with eyes towards him turned,
"Brother! you have salvation earned!

Other's welfare who keeps in mind
Nothing in world he cannot find."
For his devotion Rama him blest:
"Your soul in My Abode shall rest!

O brother! news of Sita's loss, let not upset the king,
If I am Rama, Ravana with clan, himself the news shall bring." 31

Jatayu then took celestial form,
With Divine radiance was adorned.
Peace did his tear filled eyes pervade,
As to the Lord's Glory he prayed :

"O Nirguna Saguna Maya's Lord! Hail to Thee Peerless Gracious Rama!
Thou wielder of the mighty bow which stills ten headed demons arm!
O Lotus eyed! Like rain clouds blue! Earth's hallowed by Thy Lotus Feet!
Merciful Lord! Who fears redeems! Of mighty arms! Thy Name I greet!
Dazzling Thy strength, Thou has no end, Unborn and Formless, Only One!
Beyond senses, by Vedas art known, by Thee despair o'er doubts are won!

The saints who take Thy Holy Name, upon whom Thou bestows Thy peace,
Beloved of such righteous ones, Destroyer of Kama, Thy Name I greet!
Beyond Maya, Formless, Pervading; Unborn, of Whom Srutis sing.
By disciplines Whom sages attain, by Knowledge, prayer Thy Glory bring.
That God of Mercy, Glorious Lord, has taken birth to humans please,
In every limb of Thee O Lord, my joyful heart Kama's image sees!
Easy and hard, of gentle grace, terrible and tranquill who remains,
Controlling senses and their minds, Whom sages by disciplines attain.
Of three worlds Lord, Abode of Love, Who in devotees love abides,
Whose glorious Name life cycles ends, in my heart may that Rama reside!"

Seeking the boon of everlasting devotion, Jatayu's soul was borne to Rama's Heavenly Abode. The Gracious Lord performed his last rites with His own Lotus hands. 32

16. RAMA MEETS SHABRI: NINEFOLD FORMS OF DEVOTION

According to Jatayu's directions, Rama and Lakshmana procceded southwards through dense forests on their quest for Sita. The thick jungles were a maze of tangled creepers and wild animals.

On their way they met the terrible demon Kabandha. Rama slew the demon and as he lay dying he narrated the story of his curse. "Durvasa had pronounced a curse upon me" he said, "but my sins are over now that I have beheld the Holy Feet of the Lord!"

"O Gandharva!" said Rama, "I am displeased with those who oppose saints. Those who serve saints are indeed gods on earth, and attain without effort, the shelter of Brahma and Shiva and My Compassionate Mercy." 33

Thus did the Lord propound the dharma of His devotion to him. Rama was pleased to see his deep faith and, bowing to the Lord's Feet, the Gandharva transcended to his celestial abode.

Faring further into the forests, Rama and Lakshmana came to the ashram of Shabri. Seeing Rama her heart was filled with delight as she remembered the words of sage Mattanga. Shabri beheld the graceful form of the Lord, His lotus eyes, mighty arms, his crown of matted hair and garland of flowers upon his chest. In deepest ecstasy she clasped His Lotus Feet.

Her devotion knew no bound. She escorted Rama and Lakshmana and washing their feet, laid lovely mats before them. She hastened then to bring fresh delicious fruits for her Divine guests and gazed upon them as they partook of her offerings. 34

With folded hands, devotion filled,
She quietly stood, with Bliss instilled.
"How may I pray to you?" she asked,
"Lacking knowledge and of low caste.

'Mongst lowly born a woman low,
O Lord! I have not wisdom's glow."
The Lord said: "Shabri be at ease,
Devotions bonds alone me please.

Caste, family, dharma and worldly wealth,
All wisdom, art, knowledge and strength;
Without devotion are ill fare,
Like wisps of cloud that rain don't bear.

Hearken Shabri! I will tell you,
Devotion's nine forms in words few.
First form: company of saints to seek,
Second: to hearken to my deeds.

The third: service to guru and sage, dedicated and without pride,
The fourth: to sing of My teachings, the mind without craftiness plied.

The fifth devotion Vedas proclaim :
Is to repeat My Holy Name.
The sixth: good nature, controlled well,
In good actions always to dwell.

Seventh: Seeing world of Me composed,
More faith in saints than Me reposed.
Eight: contentment in what one has,
In dreams e'en wishing none mishap.

Ninth: being simple and fair to all,
Leaning on Me for Mercy's call.
Devoted in one way of nine,
One born in this creation Mine,

Is loved by Me and earns My Grace,
Faith in Me Shabri you do place.
What sages get by the hard way,
Gladly I give to you today.

Sweet is the fruit My blessing bears,
From life death cycles jiva it spares."

"Shabri!" said the Lord, "you are devoted to God in many ways. I

bestow upon you My Benign Bliss."

Shabri gazed in wonder at the Lord as she was blessed by him. Rama then asked her if she had any news of Sita. "O Lord!" she exclaimed, "knowing all, yet You ask! Go, Lord, to the lake known as Pampa. You will meet Sugriva there who will tell you all that has happened."

Shabri bowed to Rama as her body was thrilled with the rapture of Divine Bliss. Shabri had attained the fruit of her life.

She had no need of life on earth and she was borne to that Blissful Abode from which there is no return.

Shabri then gazed upon the Lord, His Lotus Feet in heart kept firm,
By yoga her mortal form renounced, to Heavens borne ne'er to return.
'Twixt divers paths and deeds Tulsi, man is perplexed and suffers woes,
O place your steadfast faith in Rama, let love in Rama's Feet ever grow,
To lowly born in place of sin, the Lord salvation grants,
O mind unwise such Lord apart you peace and welfare want? 36

17. JOURNEY TO PAMPA: RAMA PINES FOR SITA

Leaving Shabri's ashram, Rama and Lakshmana continued their journey in the forests. They made their way towards Pampa where Shabri had said they would meet Sugriva and get news about Sita.

As they went along the arduous forest paths Rama saw the beauty of the woods and he pined for Sita with whom he had spent happy days in the past enjoying the splendour of Nature's foliage and grandeur:

"Lakshmana see the woods in bloom,
Charming hearts away from gloom!
Each bird and beast is with its mate,
They seem to shun me in my fate.

Seeing me approach flee herds of deer,
Their fawns exclaim: 'Why do you fear?
We're simple born, lose not your peace,
They come to seek a golden fleece.'

The elephant clings to his own mate,
As if to point out my mistake.
Lessons learnt one should oft repeat,
King's favour should not bring conceit.

So too a woman of one's heart,
Like learning, kings, may go apart.
Brother, though lively is the spring,
Yearning for Sita grief does bring.

Thinking me lonely and distressed, with power lost, support to lack,

Armed with beauty of woods and birds, Kamadeva hastens to me attack. 37a

My brother gives me his support, he has been thus told by his spies,
He halts his army hearing this, and in the thickets waiting lies. 37b

Creepers entwined in lofty trees,
Appear like lovely canopies.
The tall plantain and high palm trees,
Like flags and banners in the breeze.

Those who are careful and keep calm,
Distraction does not them alarm.
The trees are overlaid with flowers.
Like archers dressed await the hours.

In clusters trees of the woods dense,
Like warriors grouped in thought intense.
Like elephant's call the cuckoo's song,
Shy beasts like camels march along.

Peacock, pigeon and scurrying mouse,
Like glittering horses prance about.
Like soldiers are the smaller birds,
A waiting call of Kamadeva's words.

Chariots; Hill rocks; drums: the falls;
Sparrows : bandmen, giving war calls,
With his large army camping thus,
Kamadeva challenges as he struts!

Lakshmana! wise men seeing strength of Kama,
Turn in detachment with hearts calm.
Kamadeva's strength is woman's amour,
Good man from their wiles detour.

Lust and passion, greed and anger, are vile forms of vice O brother,
These may sway e'en learned sages, if they for a moment waver. 38a
Pride and yearning feed the greedy, anger's strength is fiery words,
Passion thrives on charms of woman, learned men have so observed." 38b

Thus, O Parvati, did the Lord, Beyond the three qualities, narrate the turmoils within the hearts of those effected by emotions, and recommend detachment to the discerning.

18. NARADA VISITS RAMA: THE QUALITIES OF SAINTS

Rama arrived on the banks of the beautiful and deep, cool and clear lake

Pampa. Four lovely ghats were built around it. Lotus blossomed on the water and fishes sported in its cool depths. A number of ashrams were located amidst champa, kadamb, mango and jackfruit trees. 39

Rama bathed and took abode under a beautiful shady tree. Sages and saints residing in the neighbourhood, came to pay obeisance to the Lord and departed after singing to His Glory.

When Narada heard that the Lord had taken abode at Pampa, he was filled with remorse for having pronounced a curse upon him due to which he had to suffer such travail in the woods. He yearned to behold the Glorious Form of the Lord and, picking up his lute, he came to Pampa. He sung of the Glory of Rama and bowed to His Lotus Feet. Seeing Narada, Rama raised him and clasped him to his heart. Lakshmana seated the sage with great respect and paid obeisance to him. 40

Narada then folded his hands and, seeing the Lord pleased with him gently spoke: "Hearken O Rama! Benign by nature! Both attainable and difficult to attain! I ask of Thee a boon! Even though Thou knowest all, grant me the desire of my heart!" 41

"Sage" replied Rama, "you know My nature. What do I keep hidden from My devotees ? What is there, O sage, that is dear to me that you cannot ask for? There is nothing that I cannot give to My devotee. This you should always bear in mind." 42a

Narada was delighted by the Lord's words, "This is the boon that I presume to ask!" he exclaimed. "Many are the Names of the Lord, each according to the Vedas, being more dazzling than the others. Yet, may the Name of Rama be the destroyer of sins. May the Name of Rama be the full moon in the night of devotion, amidst other Divine Names like stars in the sky-like expanse of hearts of saints!" 42b

"So shall it be" said the Lord, and Narada bowed to Him with deep reverence.

Knowing Rama to be pleased with him, Narada respectfully asked: "Once when I was enmeshed in Your Wondrous Maya, I desired to marry. Why did You Lord, prevent me from doing so?"

"O sage!" said Rama, "I declare with pleasure that I grant My Benign Shelter to those who renounce all hopes and dedicate their lives to Me.

In My shelter who himself lays,
Renouncing other means and ways;

Measures for his welfare I take,
Like mother looks after her babe.
To save her child from fire or snake,
A mother will her own life stake.

Her grown up child though she loves still,
Lets him depend on his own will.
Learned are like my grown up sons,
Like young children, devoted ones.

Devotees on My power depend,
Learned themselves seek to defend.
Therefore the wise too chant My Name,
Steadfast though learning they attain."

"Lust, anger, greed and arrogance, O sage!" continued the Lord, "are the soldiers of the army of ignorance. Of these lust is most devastating. In woods of attachments, lust comes like Spring. Waters of lakes of prayer and good deeds are dried up when lust descends upon them like hotness of the summer season. Greed, anger and arrogance pervade the mind like frogs and insects when lust pours down into conscience like blinding showers of the rainy season. 43

From lust emanate evil desires like kumud flowers blossom in autumn. Then lust destroys dharma, even as beautiful lotus flowers wither in the cold winter season.

"Lust encompasses wisdom, strength, gentleness and truth even as a net confines fishes within itself,

Knowing this, O sage, I dissuaded you from marrying as your desires had emanated from lust." 44

Listening to the Lord the great sage was filled with bliss. Knowing that he had been saved from clutches of lust by Rama's Divine Grace, he was filled with devotion. "O Rama!" he exclaimed, "O Destroyer of fear of life-death cycles! Narrate to me the qualities of saints!"

Pleased with his deep devotion, the Merciful Rama said:

"Nature of saints, O sage now from me hear,
For which they are unto me near and dear.
Calm, kind and unmoved by emotions surge,
Sinless and besieged not by passion's urge.

Free of yearnings, they are learned and pure,
Detached and happy, of words they are sure.
Gentle, well mannered, respect to all they give,
Patient and prideless, simply do they live.

Without regrets they attain peace, having no doubts in mind,
Always absorbed in devotion, attachments leave behind. 45

No praise they ever seek for their own name,
To other they are always wishing fame.

They strive for peace and justice to all teach,
Contented live, content to others preach.

Controlling senses, fast, meditate and pray,
Forgiving faults, in virtue spend the day.
Giving Me all, to every one they're friend,
Fixed in devotion, life they simply spend.

Desires renounced, discernment their's is keen,
Well versed in Vedas, with joy expound their theme.
They have no trace of jealousy, avarice, greed,
They are from evil actions ever freed.

Singing of My Glory their life they spend,
To others' causeless welfare they attend.
With many qualities, sage, saints are replete,
E'en Shesha Sarda cannot fully repeat."

Shesh Sarda can't qualities repeat, sage heard, clasped to Rama's Feet remained,
Thus qualities of devotees His, the Lord Himself to sage explained.
Narada betimes bowed to Lord's Feet, enthralled to Bramha's Abode he hied,
Tulsi, such men are blessed indeed, whose hearts in hues of Lord are dyed.
Who hear and sing in rapture filled, the glorious deeds of Ravana's foe,
They shall attain sans penance yoga, of Rama's devotion radiant glow.46a
Like flame of lamp is maiden's form, do not become an insect, Mind!
From lust and passions turn away, in prayer 'midst saints to welfare find.
46b

Thus ends Aranya Kanda
(The Book of Forests)
The third book of
Ramacharitmanasa
which destroys all sins of Kaliyuga.

BOOK FOUR

KISHKINDHA KANDA

(The Book of Kishkindha)

Fair and sky-blue like kund lotus, of Peerless might, wise in all arts,
With glory filled, skilled archers both, hailed by the Vedas, love saintly hearts;
By Maya taken human forms, bear dharma's mantle and favours show,
Searching for Sita on wood paths, may traveller brothers love bestow. 1 Sl

Who churns the Ocean of the Vedas, to Kaliyuga's poisonous sins spells doom,
The Indestructible form of Shiva, radiant like glory of the moon.
Infallible remedy for the ills of birth cycles, Who welfare brings,
They blessings earn who dwell on Shiva, who Rama's nectarial Name e'er sing. 2 Sl

Kashi deep learning gives, sins are destroyed, Salvation's ground,
Where Shiva Parvati live, that Kashi why does not one serve? So
In anguish when gods burned, He swallowed poison's bitter cup,
Why then from Him one turns, to Shambhu pray who Mercy grants. So

1. RAMA MEETS HANUMAN

From lake Pampa, Rama proceeded towards the Rishyamuka mountains where he was told Sugriva lived with his ministers in hiding. As Sugriva saw Rama and Lakshmana from a distance, approaching the Rishyamuka hills, he asked Hanuman to go to them.

In Sita's quest, resolved in will,
Rama turned towards the Rishyamuka hill.
Sugriva who dwelt in hiding there,
Beheld the brothers thither fare.

Calling Hanuman, taken with fear.
He said: "Two warriors hasten here.

Go meet them disguised as a saint,
Finding their purpose, me acquaint.

If wicked Bali sends to slay,
I'll leave this place and go away."
Hanuman went forth as brahmin masked,
Bowing to the Lord he humbly asked:

Who are you sires, sky blue and fair,
Like warriors in the forests fare?
Treading rough ground with your feet,
What do you in the forest seek?

Your gentle limbs are full of grace,
Yet hardships of the woods you face.
Are you Brahma, Vishnu or Mahesh,
Or Nara, Narayana in human shape?

God, Primeval Cause of life, Saviour of all living kind,
Incarnated in human form, to give salvation to mankind?" 1

"We are King Dashratha's sons" Rama said,
"His commands have to woods us led.
Rama, Lakshmana, brothers two are we,
My wife came with us, we were three.

A demon took my wife away,
O saint we seek her night and day.
This is the reason of our quest,
Tell us your name now we request."

To clasp Rama's Feet then Hanuman fell,
What words his heart's rapture can tell.
His body thrilled, no speech he found,
As at the Lord he gazed spell bound.

Heart filled with joy, his mind made calm,
Hanuman then spoke to his Lord Rama:

"Master! I saw not Thy form's mask,
But why dost Thou like humans ask?
Thy Maya on me cast a spell,
I saw Thee not as hermit dwell.

Dull is my mind, attachment bound, ignorant, of bewildered heart,
Dost Thou forget me too, O Lord, Thou Who Abode of Mercy art? 2

O Lord with faults though I am wrought,
Masters devotees forget not.
By Thy Maya all jiva beset,
Through Thy Mercy salvation get!

O Raghuvira! by Thy Name I swear,
I know not penance neither prayer.
Devotee like a child depends,
Upon the Lord Who for him fends."

Thus saying Hanuman fell to His Feet,
Showing his real form, lost in love deep.
The Gracious Lord then Hanuman raised,
With tears of tender love embraced.

"O Vanar! be not grieved in heart,
Twice dearer than Lakshmana thou art.
All are born equal in my eyes,
But dearest who on me relies.

Hanuman! who offers all to me, this in his mind firmly resolves:
To serve Me, knowing world entire, within My Divine Form revolves." 3

2. RAMA MEETS SUGRIVA

Hanuman was in ecstasy as he received the Benign blessings of the Lord. Gazing upon His Wondrous Form, Hanuman said: "O Lord! Sugriva resides on yonder Rishyamuk hills. He is Your devotee. Grant him Your friendship and knowing him to be oppressed, bestow upon him Your Divine Mercy."

To Sugriva, Lord grant friendship please,
From fear and sorrow him release.
He will assist you in your quest,
Send vanars brave at your behest.

Thus Sugriva's grief did Hanuman state,
And to him Rama and Lakshmana take.
Seeing Hanuman with the Lord return,
Life's fruit Sugriva knew he would earn.

Bowing humbly to their Lotus feet,
The vanar did Rama Lakshmana greet.
Sugriva thus pondered in his mind:
"O God! will I his friendship find."

Rama's quest and cause of Sugriva's grief, Hanuman then did reveal,
With fire as witness between them, bonds of friendship did seal. 4

Deep love pervaded in their heart,
Rama's story Lakshmana did impart.
With tear filled eyes Sugriva then said:
"Lord! news of Sita we shall get.

'Mongst my ministers here one day,
When we conferred to find some way,
A demon hied across the sky,
I saw Sita in distress sigh.

'O Rama! O Rama!' Sita did call,
She saw me and her scarf let fall."
Sugriva brought it, by Rama when asked,
Rama in love's grief to bosom clasped.

Said Sugriva then: "Hearken O Rama!
Do not despair, your heart do calm.
In every way I'll serve your feet,
Sita her Lord shall surely meet."

Hearing words gentle of Sugriva, ocean of Mercy Rama was pleased,
"Sugriva" he said, "why do you live, here alone, and with terror seized?"5

Sugriva said: "Bali is my brother,
We had great love for one another;
Maivi, the demon Mai's vile son,
To our palace one day had come.

At night he challenged at the gate,
Bali arose in fiery hate.
Seeing Bali, Maivi ran away,
As he chased him I ran his way.

Maivi frightened, hid in a cave,
Then Bali these instructions gave:
'Till fifteen days for me abide,
If I come not, know I have died.'

I waited there for thirty days,
Then streams of blood gushed from the cave,
'Now he will kill me next' I thought,
In fear I closed cave's mouth with rock.

The people thought Bali was dead,
They placed the crown upon my head.
Bali returned, the demon killed,
Seeing me he was with fury filled.

He struck me though I cried for life,
He took from me my wealth and wife.
Afraid of him and of his might,
Hidden on this hill I abide.

As he is cursed, he dares not here,
But of his might I live in fear."
Devotees distress as Rama heard,
With Mercy deep, his heart was stirred.

"Listen my friend, I'll Bali kill, with a single arrow from my bow,
Even Brahma's shelter if he seeks, I will not spare him you should know.6

One should avoid such vile persons,
Who grieve not at their friend's burdens.
Like speck of dust is one's own plight,
A friend's small troubles, mountain like.

Those who do not this understand,
Why do they seek sweet friendship's hand?
On should turn friend from bad to good,
Talk of his virtues, his vice hood.

With all his strength give help untold,
In distress love a hundred fold;
Harbour no doubt in give and take,
Thus Vedas nature of friends relate.

A thrifty king, a woman bizarre,
A crafty friend, of these beware.
I'll help you friend, do not despair,
Be not afraid, strength from me bear."

Sugriva was overjoyed at the proffered hand of friendship of Rama. But he was assailed with thoughts of Bali's might and wondered if Rama could vanquished him in conflict. Thus doubting the Lord's strength, Sugriva said: "O Raghuvira! Bali is a mighty warrior of immense strength". He then showed Rama bones of the formidable demon Dundubhi whom Bali had slain and the lofty palm trees amidst which they rested. The Lord smiled at Sugriva's doubts and he pushed the bones of the slain warrior effortlessly while an arrow from his bow cleft the seven tall trees that stood in a row.

Sugriva was delighted and knew that the Lord would undoubtedly slay Bali. He bowed again and again to Rama and then realised that He was the Merciful Lord! When he comprehended the Glory of the Lord he exclaimed, "Lord! by Your Grace my mind is now calm. I will renounce,

wealth, family, pleasure and fame to serve You with humble devotion.

"Saints who sing of the Glory of Your Lotus Feet, say that worldly pleasures are enemies of Your devotion.

All the opposites: pleasure and pain; friends and enemies are all illusions of Maya and do not in reality exist.

"O Rama! Bali has indeed turned out to be my will-wisher. Through him I have had the fortune of beholding You and sins have been destroyed. Not even in dreams would I now like to have strife with Bali, for it would embarrass me to find on waking that I had even unconsciously harboured such thoughts against him."

"Lord! I now only seek Your Bountiful Grace so that I may be absorbed in Your devotion day and night!"

Hearing Sugriva's words of devotion, Rama smiled and said: "You have spoken well, my friend. But my words are unalterable, and the wicked have to bear punishment for their misdeeds."

3. RAMA SLAYS BALI

Having blessed Sugriva and assured him of his assistance, Rama took his bow and arrows and went with him towards Bali's palace.

With Sugriva, Rama went to the gate,
Bow in his hand, quiver at waist.
Drawing strength from Rama, claiming his right,
Sugriva called Bali out to fight.

Hearing him, Bali rushed inflamed,
His wife in gentle words restrained:
"My love, those with Sugriva aligned,
Have strength you cannot undermine.

Sons of Dashratha: Rama and Lakshmana
Are beyond fates and destruction."

Bali said: "Fear not my love, Rama knows every one's mind,
Even if I am killed by him, I will salvation find." 7

Speaking thus, Bali proudly went,
Like straw disdaining Sugriva's strength
In mighty duel they engaged,
Striking him, Bali roared enraged.

Sugriva ran hurt and filled with fright,
Like lightning Bali's blow did strike.
"O Lord!" he groaned, "I told you so,
My brother is a cruel foe!"

Rama said: "You are both so alike,
I knew not how Bali to strike".
The Lord then Sugriva's body blessed,
His weakness gone he went refreshed.

A garland round him Rama had placed,
Which marked him as Bali he faced.
They fought grimly without respite,
Behind a tree, Rama saw them fight.

Sugriva fought him with all his strength, but was humbled at last,
A deadly arrow Rama then sent, aiming at Bali's heart. 8

The fiery arrow Bali felled,
Raising himself he Rama beheld.
Of sky blue hue, hair piled on head,
Bow in his hands, his eyes were red.

His image in his heart retained,
His life's salvation he attained.
Love in his heart but in words masked,
Gazing at Rama he harshly asked:

"'Tis said by dharma Lord you're revealed,
Yet You killed me awhile concealed.
Sugriva Your friend and I foe be,
What was my fault for killing me?"

Rama said: "One's brother and son's wife,
Sister and daughter are alike.
Bali! in your arrogant pride,
You heeded not even your wife.

In My shelter Sugriva faith lay,
You sought devotee mine to slay."

The Glory of the Lord was revealed to Bali in that instant. Bowing to Rama he said: "Lord! receiving Thy shelter in my last moments, am I still sinner?" 9

Hearing Bali's beseeching words, the Merciful Lord caressed his head and said: "Keep your life, I will make your body whole!"

Bali gazed on the Lord and said: "O Abode of Mercy! Hearken to me! Sages, through countless births, aspire to die with Thy Name upon their lips, yet the Holy Name evades them in their last moments if they are besieged with worldly cares. Thus even by Thy Holy Name humans attain salvation. It is my fortune Lord today, to behold Thy Glorious Form in my

last moments. Lord! Shall such Bliss come my way again?"

"The Lord Whom Shastras describe as 'Not this! Not this!' and Who sages, after gaining control over body and senses by all eight means of concentration, can only comprehend in small parts—that Lord stands manifested before me! "Knowing me to be full of arrogance, Thou hast offered me my life. But who is so ignorant as to destroy fruit bearing tree and grow wild thorns instead ? "Lord! Grant me my humble prayer! Wherever I may be born as a result of my actions, may I always be devoted to Thy Lotus Feet! O Saviour of humans and of gods! Angad, my son, is equal to me in valour. Accept him as Thy devotee and grant to him Mercy of Thy Benign Arms!" 10

Thus praying to the Lord, Bali died in peace, The Merciful Rama granted him His Eternal Abode.

The people of Kishkindha were grieved to hear of the news of their king's death. They hastened to where Bali's body lay. Queen Tara, wife of Bali wept. Her tresses lay scattered around her face and her clothes lay dishevelled.

Seeing Tara in deep anguish weep,
Gently the Lord to her did speak:
"From water, air, earth, fire and space,
Is this our trivial body made.

That body does before you sleep,
The soul dies not—why do you weep ?"
When wisdom dawned, His Feet she clasped,
Devotion's boon she humbly asked.

Rama asked Sugriva to perform the last rites of his brother. When this was done Rama called Lakshmana and told him to go with Sugriva to Kishkindha and have him installed as king. All bowed to Rama and proceeded to fulfil his commands. Lakshmana summoned ministers and priests of the kingdom and had Sugriva declared king of Kishkindha and Angad as the Crown Prince. 11

After he was coronated king of Kishkindha, Rama called for Sugriva and instructed him in the ways of statecraft. He then said: "Sugriva, being banished for fourteen years, I cannot enter a city. Summers are over and the rains have now come, I shall therefore reside on yonder hills nearby. Rule your kingdom along with Angad with wisdom. Bear in mind my mission."

Sugriva then returned to Kishkindha and Rama with Lakshmana took abode on the Pravarshna hills. 12

4. RAMA'S DISTRESS AND SUGRIVA'S REPENTANCE

The rains had come and Rama with Lakshmana took their abode in a cave on the Pravarshana hills. The woods around the cave were beautiful and bore lovely blossoms, and Rama lived in peace with his brother amidst the enchanting surroundings and its birds and beasts. He spent his time narrating to Lakshmana discourses on devotion, renunciation, satecraft and knowledge.

Pervaded with peace beholding the beauty of nature, but distressed in heart in not having received any news of Sita from Sugriva, Rama spoke to Lakshmana one day:

"Lakshmana see the peacocks dance, seeing the rain clouds in the skies,
Happy as renunciants seeing Vishnu's devotees with calm eyes. 13

Thundering clouds the skies pervade,
Alas! I grieve for Sita's fate.
Lightning strikes in diverse streaks,
Like passion's flame a vile man seeks.

Ground softens as the clouds bring rain,
Like learned men by wisdom gain.
Torrents of rain are borne by rocks,
Like saints calmly hear evil talks.

The pouring rains small rivulets flood,
Like wealth brings pride to peoples blood.
Mud on the earth rain water taints,
Like Maya's web entangles saints.

Waters into deep ponds collect,
Like good men good company select.
Rivers in oceans are dispersed,
Like jiva in Absolute is immersed.

The earth has become green with grass, no foot paths can be found,
Like books of learning set apart, when evil thoughts abound. 14

The croaking of the frogs appears,
Like Vedas sung by devoted seers.
Trees blossom forth in foliage new,
Like pupils bright who Vedas pursue.

Wild shrubs have started shedding leaves,
Like wicked men good kingdoms leave.
The rain has washed the soil away,
Like dharma by anger loses sway.

Though grainless yet, crops hold our eyes,
Like charity good nature implies.
Glow worms now glimmer in dark night,
Like greedy men come to unite.

Field channels are destroyed by rain,
Like women spoilt without restrain.
Farmers are busy with their hoes,
Like wise men weed desire which grows.

We miss the sweet twitter of birds,
Like dharma in evil times not heard.
Rain grows not grass on arid ground,
Like devotees are passionless found.

In fresh air sprightly insects play,
Like freedom makes all people gay.
Tired travellers are resting around,
Like yearning ridden, peace abounds.

Sometimes the wind rushes in gusts, billowing clouds away,
Like evil sons in families born, cause dharma to go astray. 15a
Sometimes the sun is behind clouds sometimes it sheds its dazzling light,
Like in bad company knowledge lost and in good company becomes bright. 15b

Lakshmana see the rains have gone!
Lovely autumn comes along!
Kans shrubs bear white fluffy flowers,
To proclaim the end of showers!

The North star seems to make paths dry,
Like with forbearance, yearnings fly.
The lakes and rivers are now clear,
Like earthly ties saints hold not dear.

From all around, waters return,
Like earthly love leaves who discern.
Birds sport gaily in autumn's sun,
Like in good times good things are done.

No slush or dust is on the ground,
Like virtues in good kings abound.
Fishes despair as waters dry,
Like foolish men for riches cry.

Tranquill and clear is cloudless sky,
Like devotees when yearnings fly.

King and beggar, saint and merchant, all enthralled by autumn's splendour,
Like men in all stages of life, all absorbed in devotion's ardour. 16

Calmly fish deep waters seek,
Like boundless are devotees meek.
Bright lotus flowers now ponds adorn,
Like Absolute as Ishwara born.

Black bees now buzz with pleasing sound,
Beautiful beasts now woods abound;
The chakwa moans in the dark night,
Like others peace is vile man's plight.

Of thirst the chataks ever fret,
Like foes of Shiva peace cannot get.
The moon dispels the autumn's heat,
Like sins washed when a sage one meets.

Chakors keep gazing at the moon,
Like devotees seeing the Lord's bloom
Cold bitter winds insects destroy,
Like those who try to saints annoy.

Worms and pests are now destroyed, in autumn cold after the rains,
Like one sheds doubts by gurus grace, and peaceful living soon attains. 17

The rains have gone, autumn has set,
We have no news of Sita yet!
Where ever she be, if she's alive,
Brother! to save her I'll contrive.

If only once we trace her track,
Vanquishing Death, I'll bring her back.
Sugriva has kingdom and queen got,
My mission he has now forgot.

The arrow that Bali did kill,
Tomorrow Sugriva's heart will still!"

Whose Mercy pride attachments frees,
Even in dreams can wrath Him seize?
Learned devoted saints can know,
These human traits that Rama did show.

When Rama in anger thus did speak,
Lakshmana did bow and arrows seek.

The Lord then out of Mercy deep, said to Lakshmana "O brother dear!
The erring Sugriva do not kill, be firm with him and bring him here." 18

Meanwhile Hanuman was worried that Sugriva had become unmindful of the Lord's work. He went to the king and bowing to him reminded him of the ethics of statesmanship pointing out that his indifference would lead to dire consequences. Hearing Hanuman's words, Sugriva was frightened and regretted that, in enjoyment of pleasures of prosperity, wisdom had forsaken him and he had neglected Ram's mission. "O Son of Wind!" said Sugriva, "now send forth messengers to the abodes of Vanar warriors to summon them to present themselves here within fifteen days failing which they shall be slain by me!"

Hanuman called messengers and conveyed the king's commands to them. They bowed to Hanuman and set forth to summon the warriors immediately.

At that very moment Lakshmana arrived:

As Lakshmana there in anger sped,
Seeing him enraged the Vanars fled.

He twanged his bow and said aloud: "To ashes I shall burn this town!" Seeing every one shudder with fright, Bali's son Angad bowed down. 19

He clasped his feet, mercy did crave,
The graceful Lakshmana him forgave.
Hearing Lakshmana was in wrath wrought,
Sugriva spoke quickly in fear wrought:

"Hanuman! Queen Tara with you take,
Appease the prince, peaceful him make!"
Hanuman with Tara to him went,
Told him messengers they had sent,

Beseeching him they brought him home,
Washing his feet, set for him throne.
The Vanar king bowed to his feet,
Embracing him Lakshmana did greet.

Sugriva said: "Lord! by worldly greed,
E'en saints once misled are not freed."
Hearing Sugriva thus humbly plead,
Solacing him, Lakshmana was pleased.

When Lakshmana was satisfied that arrangements were made to search for Sita, Sugriva along with Angad and other Vanars requested Lakshmana to lead them to Rama. 20

Sugriva bowed to Rama and folding his hands said: "I am not to blame O Lord! Wondrous indeed is the might of Thy Maya. Only by Thy Mercy can one get rid of it."

"Lord! Even gods and sages are steeped in sense pleasures. He who wards off arrow like glances of woman, who remains wakeful and calm in the dark night of passion, and who is not bound by the halter of covetousness, is indeed like Thy Own self! These qualities are not attained by disciplines. They emanate out of Thy Benign Mercy!"

The Gracious Rama smiled and told Sugriva that he was already forgiven but that he should take steps to get news of Sita soon.

5. VANARS PROCEED TO SEARCH FOR SITA

While they were talking to Rama on the Pravarshana hills, Vanar warriors summoned by messengers of Sugriva started assembling. They came from all directions and in vast numbers. They came and bowed to Rama and the gracious Lord enquired after the welfare of each of them. 21

Sugriva asked them to stand before the Lord. "O brave vanars!" he said addressing them, "Sita, the beloved consort of Rama, is held captive by a demon. This is the mission of Rama and this is my command and request to you. Spread out in all directions and search for her. Brethren! you are given a month to fulfil this mission. Those who delay, face death at my hands!"

As the vanars prepared to go, Sugriva summoned his chief warriors before him: 22

Sugriva said: "Neel, Angad, Hanuman,
O wise and clever chief Jambwan!
I bid you all go southward bound,
And look for Sita all around.

Seek her with zeal and earnest care,
On Rama's Name success you shall bear.
From back warms sun, from front the fire,
Warmth of service does heart inspire.

Serve not Maya but kingdom come,
Thus birth death cycles overcome.
Brothers! earn fruit of earthly life,
Devotion seek, spurn desires strife!

The ones engrossed in Rama's Feet,
Are wise, blessed and dharma they keep."
To Sugriva then they bowed and left,
Hope of success in their hearts kept.

Hanuman too bowed to them at last,
Rama called him back as he went past.

He blessed the valiant vanar brave,
A ring to him the Lord then gave.

"With my love give Sita this ring.
Be quick goods news of her to bring."
Hanuman left with life's hope fulfilled,
The Lord's blessings in heart instilled.

The vanars proceeded, looking for Sita in the woods, along its rivers and lakes, and in caves of the mountains. They were engrossed in the mission of the Lord, drawing strength from him and forgetting their own hardships. 23

They fought demons wherever they challenged them and asked saints and sages for assistance. Despite long and arduous journeys no success came their way. Soon they reached a waterless mountainous region and lost their way amidst the thickets and realised, that they would die of thirst if they could not find their way out.

Hanuman then climbed upto the top of the mountain peak and looked around to get his bearings and to search for water. He was thrilled to find a number of chakwas, swans and other birds entering a cave on one side of the hill. Hanuman quickly returned to his companions and they made their way to the cave.

Entering the cave they found that it led to a beautiful lake in which there were lovely lotus blossoms. A small temple was situated on the shore of the lake in which a woman sat engrossed in meditation. As they bowed to her she blessed them and asked them to quench their thirst with pure waters of the lake and take fruit from trees that grew around. 24

They narrated their mission to the woman and filled with ecstasy she said: "Close your eyes and leave the cave in yonder direction. You shall succeed in finding Sita, of this you may be assured."

The vanars carried out her instructions and they were surprised to find that they were on the shore of the ocean when they opened their eyes.

Meanwhile, Svayamaprabha, the hermit woman, went to Rama. She bowed to the Lord and implored His Mercy. The Lord granted her His eternal Devotion.

Bowing to the Holy Feet of Rama, which are hailed by Bramha and Shiva, she went to Badrika àshrama to meditate on the Lord. 25

Meanwhile the vanars were disheartened as they had still not received any news of Sita and the period allowed to them was nearing to an end. "Brothers", they said to each other, "of what use will it be to return without bearing news of Sita? We shall surely be slain by Sugriva on our return!"

Angad's eyes brimmed with tears. "In both ways, death awaits me. We have not succeeded in getting news of Sita and on return, Sugriva will

surely slay me. Indeed he would have killed me after the death of my father but Rama provided me shelter."

For a moment all were silent. Then they said: "O Prince of Vanars! We shall not return until we bear news of Sita!" Thus saying they went to the ocean shore and sat to plan out their future course.

Jambwan then addressed the vanars. "O son!" he said, "consider not Rama to be a mere human. We are indeed fortunate to have the opportunity to serve him. Of His Own free will, divinity has manifested Itself for the cause of virtue. Let us serve Him and attain His Divine Blessings." 26

Thus spoke Jambwan, narrating stories of Divine Glory to inspire the vanars to continue their search for Sita.

6. VANARS MEET SAMPATI

While Jambwan was solacing his vanar friends and beseeching them to continue their search for Sita, Sampati brother of Jatayu , was listening to their words from within a cave. As he came out the vanars were filled with terror at his huge form. Angad however recognized the brother of the King of Birds and exclaimed: "None was so blessed as Jatayu, who gave his life in the cause of Rama, and left for His Heavenly Abode."

Jatayu's name brought feelings of joy in the heart of Sampati but he was at the same time plunged in grief hearing of his death. He approached the vanars and asked them to narrate to him Jatayu's story.

Sampati was overjoyed hearing of the deeds of valour of his brother in giving battle to the demon king as he fled with Sita.

When Sampati heard of Jatayu's deeds,
The vanars he did thus entreat:

"Take me O friends to the ocean's shore, Jatayu's last rites to perform,
I'll help you find the one you seek: where Sita is I will inform." 27

Having performed his brother's rites,
He told them story of his pride:
"When we were young, Jatayu and I
Flew very near the sun in sky.

O'ercome by heat my brother turned,
But I flew on till my wings burned.
Exhausted by hot rays of sun,
I fell to earth, my pride undone.

A sage named Moon who there did dwell,
Was moved with pity when I fell.
With gentle words he calmed my mind,
Relieved of pride, peace I did find.

He said: 'Wait till the Lord is born,
You'll see his captive wife forlorn.
Rama's friends will come her news to seek,
Your grief will end when them you meet.

Where she is taken by the foe,
Tell them and lo your wings will grow!'
The sage's words have now come true,
Listen to me and Rama's work do.

On Mount Trikut Ravana resides,
In his palace he Sita hides.
In Ashoka gardens, in despair,
I see her now shedding tears there.

Though I can see her you cannot, vultures can see beyond the rest,
I am with old age weakened now, else I would help you in your quest." 28

"Only one who can cross a stretch of one hundred *yojanas* of ocean can hope to reach where she is kept imprisoned" added Sampati, aware of the difficult mission the vanars were required to perform. "But do not despair and be calm in your hearts! Behold! how my body becomes whole again by the Grace of Rama.

Even sinners who take His Name attain salvation. You are the messengers of such a One! Therefore do not be disheartened and seek a way to fulfil the Lord's mission."

Thus inspiring the vanars not to forsake the mission before them, Sampati departed.

7. HANUMAN CHOSEN TO CROSS THE OCEAN

The vanars were dismayed by the difficult task before them. They wondered which of them had strength and courage to leap a hundred *yojanas* across the ocean.

Each took stock of his strength. But all expressed doubts in their capacity to cross the ocean. "I am old now" said Jambwan, "and I do not now have a fraction of strength that I had in my youth. When the Lord had come in the Vaman Form, I had vigour in my body and even as He grew in Form with infinite speed, I took seven rounds of Him in moments." Others also measured their strength: 29

Said Angad: "I can ocean leap,
But doubt if I can back here reach."
Jambwan said: "None could worthier be,
But he who leads should cross not sea."

Then turning to the great Hanuman,
"Why are you silent?" said Jambwan.
"O son of Wind! Like wind you're fast,
Your wisdom, skill for ever lasts!

What in the world you cannot do,
Beyond your strength, too big for you?
To do Rama's bidding you were born!"
As Hanuman rose, grew big his form!

His body shone like glittering gold,
Like mountain king appearing bold.
He said then in voice firm and deep:
"With ease I can o'er ocean leap!

Kill Ravana with his demon friends,
Mount Trikut from earth's bosom rend!
O Jambwan great! of you I ask,
Just let me know what is my task!"

Said Jambwan: "Son! do only this,
See that Sita is not amiss.
Lotus eyed Rama with His Own bow,
While we look on, will kill the foe!"

"Rama will take the vanar army and slay the demons!" added Jambwan. "He will bring back Sita and Narada and the gods will sing of the Glory of the Lord!"

Taking the vanar armies Rama will demon kill, Sita reclaim,
Narada sages and gods will sing in three worlds, glory of Rama's fame,
Hearing dwelling and singing which gives Rama's Abode to men with ease,

Of these deeds Tulsi too doth sing in Lotus Feet engrossed like bees.
Rama's Glory cures evil of birth, to hear them thrill imparts,
All those who hear, Rama will fulfil the yearnings of their hearts. 30a
Radiance of million Kamas, Whose Form is like the lotus blue,
Hear Qualities of such Rama, His Name ends sins like hunter's aim.
30b So

Thus ends Kishkindha Kanda
(The Book of Kishkindha)
The fourth book of
Ramacharitmanasa
which destroys all sins of Kaliyuga.

BOOK FIVE

SUNDER KANDA

(The Book of Beauty)

Peaceful Eternal Transcends All, Who grants salvation, All Pervades,
Who is served by Brahma Shankara Shesha, grants peaceful Bliss, is known to Vedas.
By Maya Who is human seen, God amongst gods, Who redeems sins,
I worship Peerless Rama the God, the Mine of Mercy, King of kings. 1Sl
O Raghu's Lord! I do not have another craving in my heart,
I truly say, You truly know, You are the Heart of every heart,
O Peerless Rama of Raghu's clan, fullness of Thy devotion grant,
Merciful Rama! drive vice away, my mind compelling passions haunt. 2Sl
Abode of Valour! Non-Pariel! Dazzling like Sumera's golden Mount,
The raging Fire for demon Woods, amongst the learned first thy count.
The treasure of all qualities good, dearest devotee of Lord Rama,
Thou art the lord of vanar clans, Son of the Wind god, Hail Hanuman. 3Sl

1. HANUMAN'S JOURNEY ACROSS THE OCEAN

Hanuman was delighted to hear Jambwan's gentle words. "Brethren!" he said, "Bear your tribulations with fortitude and await me here till I return bearing news of Sita's welfare."

Hanuman then bowed to his vanar friends and with the name of Rama in his heart, he made his way to a high cliff on the ocean's shore. Facing Lanka he took such a mighty leap that the cliff on which he stood sank under the earth far below the sea. He sped swiftly like an arrow from Rama's bow. He briefly touched Mount Mainak in the midst of the ocean but would not rest without completing the mission of the Lord. 1

To put Hanuman's wisdom to test, the gods sent Sursa, mother of snakes, to confront him. "I am hungry", she said hovering over Hanuman, "I come to swallow you."

"Please let me go to Lanka", Hanuman pleaded, "I have to see Sita and apprise Rama of her welfare. I will return to you thereafter and then you may devour me."

Sursa opened her large mouth but Hanuman grew twice its size. She opened her mouth further till it was one *yojana* wide, but Hanuman increased his own size to two *yojanas*. Thus gradually opened her mouth to hundred *yojanas* but could not swallow Hanuman who steadily grew up to two hundred *yojanas*!

Then suddenly he became very small and nimbly stepped in and out of her mouth before she could close it! "You have already taken me within your mouth!" he declared. "Pray let me now proceed."

Sursa was convinced of Hanuman's powers. "I have fully gauged your wisdom", she said. "You will fulfil the mission of Rama. You are indeed the store of wisdom and strength." 2

Hanuman proceeded on his journey with a happy heart. But his troubles were not yet over. He met Sinhika, a demoness, on the way. She lived in the ocean and by her magical powers, she used to grasp the reflections of large birds flying over the seas. Such was her art that, with their reflections caught by the sorceress, birds could not fly and fell into the ocean to appease hunger of the cunning demoness. She played the same trick on Hanuman. But he understood her wiles and killed her before she got anywhere near his reflection.

The rest of Hanuman's journey over the ocean was without further adventure and he arrived on Lanka's shore. He saw a high mountain peak beyond the woods. Fearlessly he ran towards it and scaled its difficult slopes. From the mountain peak he beheld the lovely city of Lanka.

From mountain peak he Lanka saw,
Its mighty fort filled him with awe.
Sea waters round its stately height,
Its golden walls shone dazzling bright.

Its jewel studded golden walls, with lovely homes within them set,
Wide roads and markets beyond them, where e'er he gazed he beauty met.
Elephants, chariots, horses, mules in numbers vast one could not count.
Thousands of demon warriors brave, marching or striding on their mounts.
Gardens and groves, woods, ponds and lakes, with lovely blossoms sweet and nice
Maidens of gods humans gandharvas, whose beauty sages would entice.
Gallant warriors like mountain built roaring and flaunting arms did fare,
To city's sporting ground they'd hie, to each another challenge dare.

Hanuman saw thousands of demon warriors guarding the city on all sides and as he saw how well guarded the city of Lanka was, he decided to enter the city by night. 3

An adventurous future awaited him in Lanka.

2. HANUMAN MEETS VIBHISHANA

Hanuman assumed a small form at nightfall and, meditating upon the Name of the Lord, he entered the city of Lanka. But it was no easy task to do so. Just as he tried to get within the gate he was challenged by Lankini, a terrible demoness who guarded the gate.

"Where do you seek to go without my permission?" she exclaimed. "O ignorant one! Do you not know my powers? All thieves provide fare to appease my hunger!"

Hanuman went up to her, retaining his small form. As he came towards her she gazed at him contemptuously, hardly expecting that anyone of his insignificant size could do her any harm. But quick as lightning Hanuman dealt her a terrible blow and she reeled with its force as blood streamed out of her mouth.

Lankini got up and folded her hands respectfully. "When Brahma granted his boon to Ravaña" she said, "he told me the sign of destruction of demons had come, when I would be overpowered by a Vanar, then I should know that the end of demons was drawing near."

"I am blessed with the sight of the messenger of Gracious Rama!" she said. "O son! all the comforts and pleasures of Heaven and salvation are outweighed by even a brief moment of company of saints. Keep the image of Kaushal's King Rama in your heart and enter the city to fulfil your mission."

"For one who is blessed by the Lord, poison becomes elixir, an enemy becomes a friend, the ocean becomes the size of a cow's hoof, fire becomes cool as sandalwood!"

Hanuman took the Name of the Lord and swiftly proceeded into the city. Still retaining his small form, he entered the splendid palaces:

Each palace Hanuman searched with care,
Seeing mighty warriors in them fare.
In Ravana's palace laid in gold,
Then strode the gallant vanar bold.

He saw Ravana in slumber deep,
But found not her he came to seek.
Another palace then in awe
With temple built within he saw.

The palace was of wondrous beauty, bearing signs of Lord's devotion,
Seeing a small Tulsi plant growing, Hanuman was filled with emotion. 5

'In this kingdom of demon kind,
A gentle house how do I find?'

While Hanuman thus to himself spoke,
Vibhishan from his slumber woke.

Taking the Lord's Name he arose,
'In him friendship I will repose'
Thought Hanuman glad a saint to find,
'Men of virtue are always kind.'

Softly he spoke in *brahmin's* guise,
To greet him hied Vibhishan wise.
Addressing him in words sincere,
"O *brahmin* god, what brings you here?

Are you the Lord's devotee, say?
Seeing you my heart with joy does sway!
Or are you Lord Himself come down,
To grant me Mercy in this town?"

The vanar great disclosed him name, and told Vibhishana what he sought,
Talking of Rama in deepest joy, both were in His devotion wrought. 6

"O son of Wind! here I abide,
Like tongue between the teeth does hide.
O brother! I am fraught with sin,
Can I Lord's Shelter ever win?

My *tamas* body unrestrained,
Devotion I have not attained.
But now Hanuman I have some hopes,
Sending His saint, Mercy denotes.

On me His favour he has placed,
His devotee my home has graced!"
Said Hanuman: "This is His way,
He loves who serve Him night and day.

Though I am born a vanar low,
The Lord His Mercy does bestow.
From us at dawn some keep away,
In fear of missing meals that day!

O friend, the Gracious Rama blessed me, even though I am born so low!"
Hanuman's eye brimmed with tears of Bliss, his heart with devotion aglow. 7

"Unfortunate indeed are those", said Hanuman, "who knowing the Infinite Mercy of the Lord, seek not His devotion but spend their lives

seeking sensuality!"

Thus Hanuman brought peace to Vibhishana's heart and was himself filled with ecstasy.

Vibhishana then narrated how Sita lived in Lanka. Hanuman was overcome with reverent devotion for Sita and implored Vibhishana to tell him how he could behold her Lotus Feet. Thereupon Vibhishana advised Hanuman to proceed to the Ashoka gardens where he would behold the Mother. With gladness in his heart, Hanuman took leave of saintly Vibhishana and proceeded towards the Ashoka gardens.

3. HANUMAN MEETS SITA

In the early hours of the morning Hanuman quietly entered the Ashoka gardens. He saw Sita sitting under a tree, meditating. He was filled with remorse seeing her forlorn and he hid himself on a branch amongst leaves of the tree under which she sat, thinking what he should do next:

He bowed to her within his heart,
As she sat sleepless and apart.
Her body lean, her hair unkempt,
Repeating Rama's Name as she wept.

Her eyes lowered towards her feet, her heart engrossed in Rama's Feet,
Seeing her in helpless solitude, Hanuman in deep distress was steeped. 8

Amidst the blossoms of a bough,
The vanar hid with heavy brow.
Just then Ravana with women came,
Ornately dressed in glamour vain.

With evil words, love and abuse,
Favours and fear, tried to seduce:
"O lovely Sita" Ravana spake,
"Even Mandodari I will make.

To wait your pleasure night and day,
Look at me once at least I pray."
With her Rama's image in her heart,
She said eyes turned from him apart:

"Demon! can glow worms' feeble light,
Cause bud to bloom as sunlight bright!
Know yourself to be just as low,
You know not might of my Rama's bow.

'Lone was I when you swooping came,
Low wicked one, you had no shame!"

Hearing himself likened to glow worm, Rama to the glorious sun,
Ravana pulled out his flashing sword, raging as his heart did burn. 9

"Fair damsel you besmirch my might,
My flashing sword shall end your pride.
Hearken e'en now, to my will bend,
Or of your life this shall be end."

Said Sita firmly: "Rama's lotus arm,
Like elephant's trunk of graceful charm.
Shall embrace me or your sword's edge.
This is, vile demon, my firm pledge.

Merciful sword! my pain relieve,
Away from Rama my heart does grieve.
O sword let your cold and sharp blade,
Now end my woeful stricken state!"

To kill her Ravana strode in wrath,
Mandodari held him in his path.
He then ordered the demons' wives,
To frighten Sita with their wiles.

"A month she has my will to bend,
If not, my sword shall be her end!"

Threatening her thus Ravana returned, wives of demons gathered around,
In various forms with awesome acts, frail Sita started to confound. 10

Amongst them there was a demoness named Trijata who was wise and devoted to the Lord. She told the others that she had dreamt that a vanar had burnt Lanka and the gallant warriors of the demons army had been slain. In her dream she had seen Ravana astride an ass. He had lost his limbs and was proceeding towards the Abode of Death.

"I am sure" she said, "that this dream will come true in a few days."

When the other demonesses heard her words they were exceedingly frightened. They quickly bowed to Sita's feet and went away. 11

Sita folded her hands and sadly spoke to Trijata: "O mother! you bear with me in my distress. Tell me some way by which I may end my life quickly. I can no longer bear separation from my lord! Bring some wood and make me a funeral pyre, I implore you. Set fire to it and make my love for my lord true and eternal."

Trijata clasped Sita's feet as she heard her anguished words. She solaced her recalling the Lord's might and power. "O beautiful one!" she said, "we cannot find fire at this hour of the night." Consoling her in many ways, Trijata returned home.

Sita remained seated under the tree. She languished for the Lord in her heart and despaired of her life:

To end her life Sita did seek,
'God gives not fire to give me peace.
So many stars glow in the sky
But to the ground not one does fly.

The moon like ball of fire at night,
My weary frame does not ignite.
O Ashoka tree! your name make true,
My anguish end, I pray to you.

Thy blossoms new, aglow like fire,
To torture me seem to conspire!'
Seeing Sita languish in despair,
Hanuman could not her anguish bear.

Then Rama's ring Hanuman gently dropped as if Ashoka gave what she asked,
Sita got up in rapturous joy and in her hand the jewel clasped. 12

Ring in her hand she was surprised,
As Sita read Rama's name inscribed.
Beholding it, sweet Sita sighed,
To calm her beating heart she tried.

'None can win o'er my lord' she thought,
'Such ring by Maya can't be wrought.'
Seeing Sita in deep turmoil lost,
Hanuman spoke gently in voice soft.

Of Rama's devotion he sung words,
Sita's face lit up with love stirred.
In deepest joy and rapture sweet,
She heard him Rama's message repeat.

Sita then said: "Kind words I hear,
Why does the speaker not appear?"
Hanuman stood by and bowed with grace,
Taken aback she turned her face.

He said: "Mother! Rama's word I bear,
In the Lord's Name I gravely swear.
A token of my words I bring,
Mother, the Lord gave me this ring"

Asked she: "How could Rama vanars meet?"
Hanuman then did Lord's deeds repeat.

As Sita heard the vanar's words, belief in heart she found,
In mind action and speech she knew, he was devotion bound. 13

Sita was thrilled, lifted her gloom!
She wept with joy, her body bloomed!
"In grief I was about to sink,
Like ship you bring me to the brink!

I bless you tell me how they fare,
Lakshmana and Rama gods of my prayer.
The gentle Lord! full of mercy!
Why has he thus forsaken me?

Devotees peace his arrows keep,
Does he think of me while I weep?
O son! I pine for sky blue form,
Will it my weary eyes adorn?"

Tears welled in her large fawn like eyes,
"When will you save me love!" she sighed.
Seeing Sita thus in anguish weep,
Hanuman said: "Mother! faith do keep.

The Lord and Lakshmana both are well,
But grieving for you anguished dwell.
Such sorrow, mother, do not show,
In double measure he loves you.

Mother have patience listen now to the message Rama has sent."
Tears of emotion filled his eyes as he spoke with face bent: 14

"The Lord has said: 'Sita my dear,
Without you all things strange appear.
Like fire look blossoms of the trees,
Night is like doom, moonlight like heat.

The lotus sprays into spears turn,
Cool raindrops like boiling oil burn.
Those who gave kindness make me fret,
cool fragrant breeze is like snakesbreath.

Grief's burden lightens by sharing.
But whom to tell what I am bearing?
My love for you, your love for me,
Is only for our hearts to see.

My heart my darling lives with you,
This is, my love, my love for you."

Hearing Rama's message for her, Sita was lost in her love for her lord. Hanuman then said: "Mother! calm your heart and meditate upon him Who grants peace to His devotees. Think of the powers of Rama and banish fear from your mind. The armies of demons are like insects and the Lord's arrow is like fire. Consider the demons already turned into ashes! 15

If Rama had known where you are held captive, he would have hastened to you. Mother! I would myself have taken you away from here, but I do not have the Lord's commands. Have patience, I beg of you for a little longer. The Lord shall come with the vanar armies and liberate you from captivity."

Sita wondered how vanars who, she thought, must be as small as Hanuman in the form in which he stood before her, could succeed in waging battle against the huge demons. "The demons are mighty warriors", she said sadly "How can small vanars confront them ?"

To clear doubts which Sita besieged,
Hanuman's small form to skies increased.
A golden form of Sumera's height,
Fearless of foes, of awesome might.

Sita's doubts were by faith replaced,
Hanuman his humble form retraced.

Hearken mother! the vanars have no wisdom strength or battle's skill,
But by the power of my Lord Rama, e'en snake can mighty Garuda kill. 16

Full of devotion, courage, might
Hanuman's words soon calmed Sita's mind.
Knowing dear to Rama she blessings gave:
"You're Mine of Virtues, mighty, brave.

Bear qualities all, e'er Ageless live,
May Rama His deep Compassion give."
'May Rama grant Mercy' when he heard,
Hanuman with deep devotion stirred.

To Sita's Feet again bowed head,
With folded hands, enthralled he said:
"Mother! content now I'll remain,
Thy blessings bear fulfilment's fame"

4. HANUMAN BURNS LANKA

Tempted by the sight of abundant and delicious fruits on trees of Ashoka Gardens, Hanuman said:

"Mother! I am with hunger seized,
Seeing lovely fruits on yonder trees."
Said Sita! "Son! guards stand around,
Huge demons for their strength renowned."

"Mother! fear not warriors brave,
I humbly your permission crave."

Assured of Hanuman's wisdom strength, Sita said: "Son your pleasure take,
Keeping Rama's Feet in heart proceed, and of the gardens fruits partake."

Hanuman was hungry and began to eat delicious fruit growing in the beautiful gardens. Demons challenged him for destroying the trees and attacked him. In the affray Hanuman killed some of the demons. Others went to Ravana's court and complained to their king that a vanar had entered Ashoka gardens and was destroying trees and eating their fruit. They informed the king that he had killed many of the demons who guarded the gardens. 18

Ravana was furious on hearing the news and he sent many of his brave warriors to slay the vanar. But Hanuman again killed many of them and drove back the others. Seething with rage Ravana sent his own son Akshaykumar with a large army of demons to kill the vanar. Hanuman fought gallantly against the army and he killed Akshaykumar in the affray.

Ravana grieved for his son and was moved to fury. He sent for his son Meghnad and told him to bring the vanar captive to his court. As Meghnad approached, Hanuman uprooted a big tree and hurled it at him. Meghnad's chariot was shattered into bits. Hanuman then grappled with demon warriors killing them one by one. Thereafter a fierce battle ensued between Hanuman and Meghnad. Both were valiant warriors and they fought for long, none conceding victory to the other.

Ultimately Meghnad used the power bestowed upon him by Brahma. With the force of this weapon Hanuman was thrown to the ground. He was then bound and carried to Ravana's court. 19

Ravana laughed aloud contemptuously when he saw Hanuman lying in front of him bound with ropes: 20

Thundered Ravana: "Now vanar tell!
On whose strength did you our trees fell.
Have you not heard of my great name?
Stand up O knave! Bow to my fame!

To kill demons how did you dare?
O fool! for life do you not care?"
Hanuman said: "Ravana, hear my word,
The strength that Maya has in world;

Strength by which Vishnu, Brahma Mahesh,
Living things destroy and create;
By which the Shesha, thousand fanged snake,
Holds on his head mountains and dales;

Strength of the Lord who Incarnates,
To shelter gods, fools educates;
The strength that broke Shiva's mighty bow,
And laid pride of haughty kings low;

Who Khara, Dushana, Trishira and Bali killed,
All famed for valour, in war skilled;

By a small portion of Whose strength, you won large kingdoms with your arms,
Whose wife in folly you have brought, of His great strength I come to warn!
21

I have heard much about your name,
Fighting Sahastrabahu you earned fame.
And fighting Bali glory earned!"
Ravana smiled though in heart he burned.

"Great king of demons! I sought food,
A vanar born, broke trees for fruit.
O king! every one cares for life,
Demons were killed by me in strife.

I killed those who had come to fight,
Your son then bound me in his might.
Of being bound I am not ashamed,
I seek to do what Rama ordained.

O Ravana! humbly I beseech,
Take my advice and be discreet.
Of your great family's honour think,
Nectar of Lord's devotion drink!

The power that sways over all things,
That over life bell of death rings;
Against that power pray do no fight,
Take my advice, send back his wife."

"Khara's slayer Rama is Merciful, who shelter seeks He gives,
His refuge He will grant to you, your sins He will forgive. 22

In your heart bring Rama's Lotus Feet,
Thus Lanka's kingdom you will keep.
Pulastya's glory shines like the moon,
Do not become dark spot of doom.

Without Rama's Name speech has no grace,
Dwell on this: passions pride efface.
Bright gems fair maiden may adorn,
But without clothes graceless her form.

Who Rama oppose lack wealth: its fame,
And wealth which comes is lost again;
In streams of non-perennial source,
Some water comes, then dries its course.

Ten headed king! on oath I warn,
None can shelter who oppose Rama;
Millions of Vishnu Brahma and Shiva
If you slight Rama, can't shelter give.

In Passions which has its vain roots, shed Pride which anguish brings,
Seek shelter of Mercy's Ocean, of Raghu's Lord's Deeds sing." 23

Proud Ravana loudly laughed and said:
"A wise vanara today we've met!
O fool, your end has now drawn near!
You dare to advise without fear!"

Hanuman said: "The reverse may be,
You are mistaken, I can see!"
Ravana in anger then did rave,
"Why does not some one kill this knave!"

To kill the vanar demons rose,
Vibhishana then did interpose.
He bowed to mighty Ravana's feet
"To kill an envoy is not meet.

Punish him in some other way!"
"Well has he spoken!" all did say.
Cruel Ravana laughed aloud and said:
"Let's maim the vanar then instead!

For monkey, friends, his tail I hear is his object of desire,

Bind it in cloth, dip it in oil, and set its end to fire. 24

When the monkey thus loses his tail,
'Lord! come to take revenge! ' he'll wail.
He speaks so much of his Lord's might,
Let us see if he dares to fight."

Hanuman then smiled in his heart,
Saraswati from him does wisdom part!
Foolish demons did Ravana hail,
And flocked around to burn his tail.

They brought big loads of cloth and oil,
While Hanuman did his tail uncoil.
They mocked and kicked him as he lay,
With jeers and taunts in cruel way.

Beating their drums at him did rail,
At last they put fire to his tail
As from the vanar's tail flames blazed,
He fled leaving the demons dazed.

On golden railings as he leaped,
In terror wives of demons shrieked.

Just then the wind blew all around, fanning the rising flames,
As Hanuman gave a mighty roar, demons hid in the lanes. 25

From roof to roof he nimbly leapt,
Each palace was by hot flames swept.
All round there was a blazing fire,
Soon flames covered the town entire.

'O father! mother!' people screamed,
'Who will now save us from this fiend?'
'This is no ape' some thought alarmed,
'He is some god as monkey garbed!

Contempt for saint brings us its fruit,
Our town turns into flames and soot.'
Lanka was soon with ashes paved,
Only Vibhishana's house was saved,

Fire was created by Lord's command,
How could His messenger be harmed?
When raging flames the city swept,
Hanuman into the ocean leapt.

5. HANUMAN TAKES LEAVE OF SITA

After the fire had been extinguished from his tail, Hanuman rested for sometime watching the blazing flames that consumed the city of Lanka. He then assumed his small form again and entered the Ashoka gardens to take leave of Sita. 26

He stood before her respectfully with folded hands:

"Mother! for my Lord let me take,
A token for remembrance sake."
As her crest jewel Sita gave,
In respect bowed the vanar brave.

She said: "To him my greetings give,
Without him Sita cannot live.
He hearkens to call of the meek,
His Mercy in my grief I seek.

Tell him recall power of his bow,
That Jayanta's evil pride did blow.
If in a month he is not here,
I will not be alive I fear.

How will I live till Rama does come,
You also have to go, my son!
Seeing you my heart had solaced found,
In grief my days will now be bound."

Comforting Sita's anguished heart, the vanar helped her grief to calm,
Then bowing to her Holy Feet, Hanuman took leave to go to Rama. 27

6. HANUMAN RETURNS TO RAMA

Hanuman took leave of Sita and reached the ocean's shore. With a mighty leap that terrified wives of demons, Hanuman sped from Lanka's shore and landed amidst vanars waiting for him on the opposite shore.

The vanars were delighted to see Hanuman and felt as if a new lease of life had been granted to them. Hanuman's happy countenance showed the vanars that he had been successful in carrying out the Lord's mission. They embraced their beloved leader and joyfully asked him to narrate his adventures. Thereafter they enthusiastically went to Rama.

On their way they came to the Madhu forest. Taking Angad's permission, the vanars merrily ate honey from beehives on the trees. They pushed away the forest guards when they were challenged by them. The guards hastened to Sugriva and told him that Crown Prince Angad was

destroying the Madhu forests by allowing his vanar friends to break its beehives.

When Sugriva heard the news he know that they must have fulfilled Rama's mission or else they would not be making merry in the Madhu woods. Even while he was lost in thought, the vanars arrived and bowed to him. 28

The vanar king asked them their welfare. "O king!" they replied, "welfare lies in beholding your royal feet. By the Grace of Sri Rama, we have attained significant success in our mission. Lord! Hanuman has fulfilled the mission and he has saved our lives!"

Sugriva clasped Hanuman in his arms and their hearts filled with joy, the vanars proceeded to convey the good news to Rama.

As Rama saw the vanars coming towards him with joyous strides, he was pleased. The vanars clasped his Feet as they reached the shining rock on which he and Lakshmana were seated. The Lord embraced the vanars and asked them their welfare. The vanars replied: "Beholding Thy Lotus Feet we have attained all welfare;" 29

"Hearken, O Lord!" said Jambwan. "On whom Thou takest Mercy, is for ever prosperous and well! Gods and sages are pleased on such a one. By Thy Mercy, our mission has been fulfilled. We have earned the fruit of our lives. O Lord! wondrous indeed are the deeds that Hanuman has done."

Jambwan then related how Hanuman had brought news of Sita from Lanka where she was being held captive. Rama clasped Hanuman to His heart:

His lotus arms round Hanuman clasped,
"How she protects herself?" Rama asked.

"Your Name protects her night and day, Your thoughts doors of her heart,
Her eyes held in Your Feet are locks, how can her life depart? 30

She bid me give this jewel crest,
(Taking it Rama to his heart pressed).
Her streaming tears her company keep,
As pining for you she does weep.

'O Lord' she said, 'You Mercy take,
Yet why do you me now forsake?
Yours in mind, action and in speech,
Tell me my fault, Lord I beseech.

The only fault I know as mine,
I die not though alone I pine.

But Lord this is fault of the eye,
That remains closed, lets soul not fly.

My body would like cotton burn,
My breath of grief into fire turn;
But streaming tears from eyes again,
Let me not burn in sorrow's flame!'

O Lord! in grief does Sita weep,
No words can spell her anguish deep.
Lord of Mercy, each moment now, eternal for Sita does seem,
Let us hasten, O Gracious Rama, vanquish the foe her grief redeem!" 31

Rama's eyes were filled with tears as he heard of Sita's sad plight and captivity in Lanka. He then spoke softly: "For one who depends upon Me in mind, in action and in speech, misfortune can never afflict even in dreams!"

Hanuman was greatly impressed by the Lord's words. "O Lord!" he exclaimed "one is besieged with misfortune only when one does not meditate upon Thy Glorious Name. Demons are of no consequence, O Lord. Thou shalt indeed defeat the demons in war and end Sita's woes!"

"O son!" said the Lord, "none amongst gods or sages has striven for my welfare as you have done. What can I offer you in return? Nothing can be adequate, this I have considered in my mind. I have searched well within my heart. I can never repay you fully for your deep devotion!" Thus said the Lord, Who is the Protector even of the gods, to Hanuman and looked at him affectionately with tears in his eyes. Hanuman, deeply touched, fell at the Lord's Feet. Clasping them he exclaimed: "Shelter me O Lord: Shelter me O Lord! Shelter me!" 32

Rama raised him and clasped him to his heart. He then asked him how he had burnt Lanka. Hanuman exclaimed: "By the might of Thy power I crossed the ocean; by the strength of Thy arms I devastated the gardens and killed demons who came to challenge me; hot flames of Thy displeasure against vice burnt the city of Lanka. For one on whom Thou grant Thy Mercy, nothing in the world is difficult!" Hanuman bowed before Rama in deepest respect. "Grant me, O Lord Rama!" he exclaimed, "Thy eternal devotion!" The Lord gazed lovingly at His faithful devotee. "So shall it be!" he softly said, as he clasped him in His arms. 33

7. THE VANAR ARMY MOVES: RAVANA REJECTS MANDODARI'S ADVICE

Rama then called Sugriva and asked him to make preparations for waging

war against demons to set Sita free. Sugriva thereupon summoned commanders of his armies and ordered them to instruct their warriors to assemble immediately. 34

Rama inspected the army formations and blessed them. The armies moved with great jubilation amidst all good omens. Warriors roared as they sped along and elephants of the forests ran astray trumpeting in confusion as the mighty army marched on. Gods in heaven watched in awe as warriors surged forward with shouts of: "Hail to the Glorious might of Rama!"

Thus the vast vanar armies reached the ocean shore. 35

Meanwhile, Lanka had been rebuilt since its destruction by the great fire, but the demons now lived in constant fear. When Queen Mandodari heard of their distress, she pleaded with her husband Ravana not to seek war with Rama.

Folding her hands, clasping his feet,
Sound words of judgment she did speak:
"O love! with Rama strife do not seek,
For our welfare my words pray heed.

Our wives when Hanuman's deeds recall,
In fright their babes from wombs do fall.
With your ministers send his wife,
If darling mine, you care for life.

Like cold nights lotus buds efface,
So Sita comes to ruin our race.
If back to Rama you do not send,
Even Brahma Shiva cannot fate mend.

Like serpents are arrows of Rama, like frogs your demons all,
Before they are swallowed by them, hearken to reason's call."

Hearing Mandodari, Ravana laughed,
In haughty pride her words he scoffed:
"With fear is woman's nature fraught,
be happy! be not weighed with thought.

To Lanka's soil if vanars dare,
For our demons they will be fare.
All tremble even at my name,
My queen afraid? This is a shame!"

Thus boasting he embraced his wife,
And went leaving his queen in strife.

Mandodari in deep distress sighed,
Now Ravana knew not wrong or right.

8. RAVANA SPURNS VIBHISHANA'S ADVICE

Leaving his queen in his palace, Ravana strode into his court where all ministers had already assembled, Proud of his victories over many kings and even gods, the arrogant demon king did not give a second thought to the entreaties of queen Mandodari.

But as he sat on his throne, messengers arrived with unexpected news:

In Ravana's court spies message bore,
Vanars had reached the ocean's shore!
Ravana his warriors advice seeked,
They proudly spoke in hauteur steeped:

"All gods and demons bow to you,
What can a herd of vanars do?"

If minister, guru or physician give advice from fear or greed,
Kingdom, dharma, body are doomed and cannot be ever retrieved. 37

Thus proud Ravana was also doomed,
In flattery lost, knew not what loomed.
Vibhishana at that moment came,
He bowed and hailed his brother's name.

Greeting him, calmy took his seat,
On being permitted thus did speak:
"Brother! you ask me to advise,
I say what I feel would be wise.

He who seeks his own welfare,
Peace, wisdom, fame and happy fare;
He does not seek another's wife,
As one sees not moon of fourth night.

If fourteen worlds had but one god,
E'en he would not oppose the Lord.
If one had all virtues and skill,
Greed would in him be denounced still.

Anger and passion, pride and greed, O King these only lead to hell,
Leave them, devotion of Rama seek, let you heart humbly in Him dwell.38

Rama is not only human's God,
Of life and death He is the Lord.

The God, Pervading all, Unborn,
The Invincible, without Form.

To redeem us in life on earth,
To grant Mercy has taken birth.
He gives peace to devotees, king!
Shelters dharma, end of vice does bring.

Oppose him not, devotion seek,
Rama's Benign Grace banishes grief.
King! send Sita back to the Lord;
Pray to him, he loves without cause.

As foe to others one who lives,
On his repenting, Rama forgives.
Whose Name relieves grief of three pains,
That Rama today to grace us deigns.

I bow to you Ravana my king, once more to you I humbly plead,
O worship Rama the Gracious Lord, renounce all passion pride and greed.
39a

Pulsatya the saint had through his pupil sent this message of the Lord,
O king on this occasion great, his love beseech, seek not discord." 39b

Malyavanta, minister old and wise,
Did also Ravana so advise.
He said: "King, to your brother listen,
With virtue do his good words glisten."

Roared Ravana: "Fool! you enemy praise,
I do not wish to see your face!"
Malyavanta arose and took his leave,
Vibhishana still did him beseech:

"Vedas, Puranas both say this O king,
To mind come good and evil things.
Welfare comes when wisdom prevails,
An evil mind one's doom entails.

In mind confused you fail to see,
A friend your foe appears to be.
Held Sita will be demon's death,
Your lust for her you shall regret.

Brother! I touch your feet once more, and seek your loving care,
Send Sita back to Rama at once, and save us from despair." 40

Vibhishana spoke to him for long.
From Vedas, Puranas and Sruti's song.
In rage thundered the demon king:
"Your words villain, your end now bring!

Fool! On my wealth you here abide,
yet you are on the enemy's side!
Tell me traitor, what I've not won,
With might of arm and of weapon!

You hermit love though demon born,
Of morals talk to them begone!"
In wrath Ravana his brother spurned,
To clasp his feet Vibhishana turned.

This is the quality of a saint,
His virtue evil does not taint.
"I love you, though you insult me,
Know king your hope in Rama will be!"

Thus saying Vibhishana went away,
While going he firmly thus did say:

"Rama is salvation knowledge Truth, O Ravana play not with death's flame,
To seek His devotion I go, not one of you should me now blame." 41

Vibhishana thereupon left Ravana's court and proceeded with such of the ministers who agreed with him to join Rama.

Lord's Graceful Feet I will behold,
Soft, red, which server spellbound hold,
Feet which redeemed Ahalya's shame,
Feet by which Dandakya pure became.

The Feet Sita engraves in heart,
Which followed golden deer of art;
Feet Shiva adores in his heart's Lake,
Those Feet to see shall be my fate.

The wooden sandals of which Feet, Bharat has fixed in mind,
I shall behold those Lotus Feet, my eyes shall rapture find. 42

Thus full of yearning to meet the Lord, Vibhishana hastened to the vanar army on the opposite shore.

9. VIBHISHANA JOINS RAMA

As Vibhishana approached the camp of the vanar army, the vanars thought that Ravana had sent an envoy to meet Rama. Holding him outside the camp, Sugriva came and told Rama that the demon king's brother sought to meet him.

Rama asked Sugriva for his advice. Sugriva said: "Lord, ways of demons are mysterious. They may have sent him as a spy to find out our strength. I therefore suggest that he should be kept captive."

Said Rama: "Of strategy you speak well,
But in devotees hearts I dwell."
Hanuman with rapture deep was filled,
Rama's heart with Mercy is instilled!

Said Rama: "One who shelter declines, concerned with his own lack or gain,
A coward verily in heart is, from whom one should aloof remain. 43

To know our strength if Ravana sends,
We should not have a care my friends;
For, Sugriva, demons fierce and skilled,
With ease by Lakshmana can be killed.

And if he comes to shelter seek,
As dear to my own heart I'll keep.

In either case" smiled Gracious Rama, "go to Vibhishana hither guide."
"Hail to the Lord of Mercy Rama!" they said, and to escort him hied. 44

With honour placing him ahead,
They showed the way to Rama that led.
Brothers from whom one peace does draw,
Vibhishana from a distance saw.

Beholding Glorious Form of Rama,
He gazed upon its wondrous charm.
His Lotus Eyes and His strong arm,
His sky blue form to shelter harm.

Chest broad, shoulders like tiger's wide,
Face more than many Kamadeva's bright.
With tears of joy in his eyes filled,
He softly spoke, his body thrilled:

"Lord! I am brother of Ravana,
God's shelter! I am born demon.

My *tamas* body sin incites,
Like owls are happy in dark nights.

Hearing Your Mercy I have come, dispelled of fear of life and death,
Sorrows Redeemer! Shelter me! Save me my Lord, save me a wretch." 45

Vibhishana bowed to the Lord's Feet,
By His devotion Rama was pleased.
He hearkened to his humble prayer,
And clasped him in His loving care.

'Midst Lakshmana and his vanar friends,
Rama spoke kind words his grief to end:
"Vibhishana speak of your welfare,
Of demon birth do not despair.

Amongst wicked is your abode,
How can you dharma there uphold?
I know your thoughts and your desire,
You dislike vice, to dharma aspire.

Better indeed to live in hell,
Then midst evil on earth to dwell."
Vibhishana said: "Changed is my fate,
Now that Mercy on me You take.

Even in dreams soul gets no peace, neither can it be calm,
Without renouncing sense desires, and being absorbed in Rama. 46

Avarice, attachment and false pride,
These vices in the heart abide,
Only till Rama does not reside,
With bow and quiver at His side!

Earthly love is like pitch dark night,
In which desires are owl's delight.
One's life in darkness shrouded lies,
Till sun of Thy Grace does not rise!

My fear is gone Lord seeing Your Feet,
I am now calm, I have no grief.
Lord, who Thy shelter has received,
Cannot by three pains be besieged.

I am by birth a demon low,
Of virtuous ways I do not know.
In minds Who sages cannot see,
That Mercy's Lord, embraces me.

O Rama! treasure of peace and joy, my fate is blessed today,
I gaze upon those Lotus Feet, to Whom Shiva Brahma do pray." 47

Said Rama: "My nature I tell you,
Which Shiva, Parvati, Bhusundi knew.
By worldly forces who opposed,
In My shelter has self reposed;

Renouncing guile, attachment, pride,
Succour I give him by My side.
Of parents, sons and family ties,
In home and wealth fancy that lies;

Of these attachments threads who takes,
Twists rope, binds heart and offering makes;
Desireless, seeing all things alike,
Whom pleasure, pain nor sorrow strikes;

These always in My heart reside,
Like wealth in miser's thoughts abide.
Good men like you to Me are dear,
For those like you I took birth here.

Those who beseech the Unborn Born, engrossed in serving others' need,
Are dear unto Me as my heart, in faith and virtue life who lead. 48

O Lanka's lord, by dharma you stand,
I therefore give you friendship's hand."
These words of Rama as vanars heard,
They hailed the Lord devotion stirred..

Vibhishana heard Rama's Benign speech.
Gentle, to ears like nectar sweet.
He clasped His Feet, devotion filled,
With deepest love his heart was thrilled,

He said: "O Lord! Who redeems woes!
Saviour of life! Who all hearts knows!
Desires that tossed within my heart,
In river of Thy love depart!

Now Lord on me Mercy bestow.
Joy of which heart of Shiva does know."
The Lord then said: "So shall it be!"
He asked for water from the sea.

"You seek not friend, though this I know,
yet My words cannot empty go."
As Lanka's king Rama him then hailed.
Gods from the skies sweet blossoms rained.

In blazing flames of Ravana's wrath, fanned by his virtuous words.
Rama saved Vibhishana from burning, the crown on him conferred. 49a
The kingdom Shiva to Ravana gave, on offerings of his heads.
That wealth Rama to Vibhishana gave, by his simple love led. 49b

Those who to such Lord do not pray.
Lack wisdom spurning Mercy's ray.
Vibhishana as His own Rama took,
The vanars did enchanted look!

As human born, demons to slay,
In keeping with custom and way,
Who all contains yet is apart,
Said such a Rama, Knower of hearts:

"Vibhishana, Sugriva, way now seek,
For us to cross the ocean deep.
Snakes, reptiles in each tossing wave,
Its dismal depths have dangers grave."

Vibhishana said: "An arrow Thine,
Can dry each drop of ocean's brine!
Yet we should not leave peaceful way,
Let us first to the sea god pray.

Let us beseech the ocean god, he is a forebear of your clan.
Apprise him of our task and pray, he surely will devise a plan." 50

Said Rama: "O friend! you wisely speak,
Gods help to ask indeed is meet."

This advice Lakshmana did not like,
Pained by delay he yearned to strike.
Said he: "Why on sea god rely,
Be firm in heart, the ocean dry!

On help of gods depend the meek,
Their mercy only lazy seek!"
Hearing Lakshmana smiling said Rama:
"So will I do, but yet be calm."

His brother's wrath when thus appeased,
Rama himself shore of ocean reached.
He bowed his head, sea god did greet,
Then on a *kush* mat took his seat.

Thus the Lord prepared to request the sea god to help the vanar army to cross over to Lanka.

10. RAVANA SENDS SPIES AFTER VIBHISHANA

Ravana was furious when he was told that Vibhishana had crossed the ocean to join the vanar army. He sent spies after him to find out how Vibhishana had been received in the enemy's camp and to bring news of the strength of the vanar army.

To join Rama as Vibhishana hied,
After him Ravana sent his spies.

Disguised as vanars when they came, they saw the love Vibhishana got,
They praised Rama for His Benign Grace, giving Mercy to those who sought. 51

Deeply absorbed, the Lord they praised,
Their work forgot, in rapture gazed.
Soon they were known as spies and caught;
To Sugriva captured they were brought.

Sugriva said: "Send these demons back,
But maim them ere to Lanka pack."
Vanars were filled with mirthful glee,
Beating them as they tried to flee.

They'd jump on them or pinch or bite,
Till they shouted with all their might.
Loudly they besought in their plight:
"On Rama's name pray give us respite!"

Hearing them Lakshmana called them near.
He smiled in pity at their fear.
Said he: "give Ravana this to read,
Tell him my words with care to heed.

Convey the fool this message mine, that I send for his sake,
'Avoid doom of the demon clan, send Sita back, peace make!" 52

The spies bowed to Lakshmana's Feet and, singing the praises of the Lord, they returned to Lanka.

11. THE SPIES REPORT TO RAVANA

The spies hastened back to Ravana's court and the ten headed monarch smiled disdainfully and said: "O Shuka! speak of your welfare. Relate the doings of the traitor Vibhishana whose end draws near. The fool has renounced Lanka where he lived in luxury. He shall now suffer by being destroyed along with the enemy.

Narrate details of the vanar army that comes unwittingly into the jaws of death, being alive even now merely because the ocean is between them and my demons who will devour them! Then tell me how the two renunciant brothers fare who are sorely frightened of my power. Could you meet them or have they already hied away hearing of my might and strength?" 53

Shuka, the spy, then humbly said: "O great king! Listen to us abjuring anger even as you have enquired of our welfare with kindness. When your younger brother Vibhishana met Rama, he was anointed king of Lanka. When the vanars found out that we were your spies, they caught us easily and bound us with ropes. They inflicted grievous injuries on us and released us only when we implored mercy in the name of Rama. O King! the army of vanars is vast and terrible. They have many divisions. All their soldiers are ferocious and of astounding might. There are mighty warriors like Dwivida, Mayanda, Neel, Nal, Angad, Gada, Vikatasya, Dadhimukha, Kesari, Nishta, Shata, and Jambwan. All these warriors are as strong and mighty as Sugriva. O ten headed emperor! the army has countless soldiers who are filled with zeal for battle and are pining to attack us. Vanars are shouting hair raising war cries. Some are saying: 'We will dry the ocean by swallowing its waters along with its snakes and fishes.' Others say: 'We will cover the ocean with huge rocks and march to Lanka to destroy Ravana!' They are terrible to look at and appear as if they are determined to swallow even our Lanka!"

"We have described you strength of the army. But the strength and might of Rama, O king, is even greater and cannot be calculated. Rama, can conquer Death Itself. His arrows can dry the ocean. Yet out of worldly ways he asked Vibhishana to advise how they should cross the ocean." 55

"Following Vibhishana's advice, Rama is presently beseeching the ocean to give his army passage to cross the ocean!"

Hearing the spies relate how Rama was imploring the ocean to allow his army to pass, Ravana roared with laughter. "Such is his wisdom!" he sneered. "Vanars are his advisers. Cowardly Vibhishana has also rendered advice in accordance with his nature! I have gauged the enemy's strength! Now stop your gibbering talk!"

Shuka was sorely distressed at Ravana's arrogance. He then silently

gave him Lakshmana's letter. Ravana took it contemptuously with his left hand and gave it to his minister to read it out to the court.

'O fool', it read, 'by empty words, seek not your own disaster.
Not even Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesha, will shelter' gainst the Master. 56a
Either like your brother Vibhishana, Lord Rama's devotion choose,
Or fool! face Rama's arrows destruction and lives of demons lose!' 56b

In heart Ravana trembled with fright,
But spoke words affected and light.
"Like worm seeking the sky to ride,
This small renunciant shows his pride!"

Shuka said: "King! take his words as true,
Leave boastful pride that we may rue.
Renounce anger, heed what I say,
Ravana! seek not to cross Rama's way!

Though Lord of life both small and big,
It is His Nature to forgive.
Meet Him and He shall mercy show,
With His devotion you will glow.

To Rama return Sita his wife,
O King! I pray heed my advice."
Of sending Sita when he heard.
Ravana spurned him in anger stirred.

To his vain king then Shuka bowed low.
And went to Rama, his heart aglow.

Shuka bowed to the Lord and related what had transpired at Lanka. Rama blessed him and he retreated to an ashram in the woods and spent his days in meditation upon the Lord.

12. HOW TO CROSS THE OCEAN?

The vanar army waited on the sea shore while Rama implored the sea god to provide way for them to cross the ocean. Rama's prayers had however no response from the sea god:
For full three days Lord Rama pleaded, the sea god did not care to hear.
Firmly then Rama thus did speak: "Love seems to need the sting of fear.57

Lakshmana! to bring my bow now hie,
My fiery arrow shall sea dry.
To crafty love, fool to beseech,
To miser talk of charity sweet;

Knowledge without attachment freed,
Detachment's way to one of greed;
To wrathful, talk of bliss of peace,
To lustful, of God's deed to preach;

In these one hopes not to succeed,
On arid land like sowing seed."
Thus said the Lord and held his bow,
Lakshmana with joy became aglow.

As Rama strung an arrow to his bow, the sea god shuddered with fear. Crocodiles, snakes, fishes and other reptiles dwelling in the ocean's waters were sorely distressed.

Forgetting his pride the sea god then humbly appeared before Rama with jewels from the sea in a golden tray. Such is the way of obstinate ones; they hearken not to entreaty of love but respond to the sting of wrath, even like the plantain fruit that ripens not by ceaseless waterings and will do so only when the tree is cut. 58

The sea god begged the Lord to have mercy on the countless living creatures that dwell in the ocean and who would perish if the ocean was dried because of His Wrath. "It is good for me", prayed the sea god humbly, "that the Lord has taught me a lesson to dispel my ignorance and pride. But all creation exists by the Lord's pleasure. The ignorant, the wicked and the lustful, even as beasts and drums are all controlled by beating!"

Hearing the humble prayer of the sea god, the Lord smiled and said: "Quickly tell me sire, some way by which our armies can cross the ocean". 59

The sea god then said: "Nal and Neel are wise craftsmen. They can construct a bridge across the ocean. I will assist them, O Lord, to the best of my ability.

This arrow of the fire that you have drawn, use not upon me O Merciful Lord, Destroy instead the vile Abhiras of the North who contaminate the waters that flow into me."

The Lord took mercy on the ocean and destroyed all rivers in the land of the wicked Abhirs by His arrow of fire.

Rama then decided to wait on the sea-shore till Nal and Neel constructed a bridge across the ocean.

The Sea-god went to his abode, the Lord was pleased by his appeal,
These Deeds redeem from Kaliyuga's sins, Tulsi sings of them as he feels.
Rama's Deeds of welfare are Abode, they doubts remove all sorrows end,
O foolish mind! leave earthly hopes, in Rama's pure Feet for ever dwell.

All welfare attends Deeds of Rama, they bring sweet bliss on earth,
Those who dwell on them with regard, sans ship cross Sea of birth. 60

Thus ends Sunder Kanda
(The Book of Beauty)
The fifth book of
Ramacharitmanasa
which destroys all sins of Kaliyuga.

BOOK SIX

LANKA KANDA

(The Book of Lanka)

Rama, served by slayer of Kama deals death, like tiger mauls an elephant brave,
By wisdom known the yogi's Lord, Qualities' Abode from rebirth saves;
Eternal, Without Qualities, Form, Beyond Maya, the Lord of gods,
Lotus eyes, form like rain clouds blue, as earthly king I hail The Lord. 1Sl
Like conch and moon his dazzling form, a tiger skin o'er body draped,
Deadly snakes are his ornaments, loves Ganga and moon crescent shaped.
Kashi's Lord Kaliyuga's sins destroys, Wish Bearing Tree for all welfare,
Kama burned to ashes, Uma's Spouse, Qualities' Abode! Shiva heed my prayer! 2 Sl
Who grants to saintly men when pleased, eternal salvation's gift rare,
May Bounteous Shiva who grants welfare be pleased to take me in his care.

1. THE BRIDGE CONSTRUCTED ACROSS THE OCEAN

Rama then called his ministers of war and said: "The bridge must now be constructed without delay so that our army can cross over to Lanka."

Jambwan folded his hands and stood before the Lord : "O Rama!" he exclaimed, "Thy Name is the bridge over which mortals cross the ocean of life! This small ocean we shall bridge in no time with the Grace of Thy power!"

Jambwan then summoned Nal and Neel:

Jambwan called brothers Nal and Neel,
The Lord's wishes to them reveal.
"His Name on lips, his strength in heart,
Take, and to bridge the ocean start."

Then orders to his armies gave:
"O Rama's devotees! Vanars brave!
Placing your faith in the Lord's Feet,
Help to perform this mammoth feat.

To forests dense and high hills flock,
And bring uprooted trees and rocks!"
Hearing his words the vanars went,
Hailing the Lord the air they rent.

They pulled large rocks and towering trees with ease as if in play,
Bringing them to Nal and Neel, who bridge with skill did lay. 1

In quick succession they brought rocks,
Which Nal Neel deftly took like balls.
Seeing wondrous bridge thus quickly made,
Rama to the vanar warriors spake:

"This is a lovely unique place,
So beautiful and of such grace
Shiva's image I would consecrate;
This is my wish to undertake!"

As soon as Sugriva heard of the Lord's desire, he sent messengers all over and celebrated sages assembled to consecrate the image installed at the hallowed site.

After Shiva's image had been consecrated and prayers held, the Lord spoke to the assembled sages:

Who love Shankara and Me oppose, My devotees who turn from Shiva,
Such human shall for one whole kalpa in Hell's consuming Fire live. 2

Who Rameshwara with love behold,
Shall earn their place in My Abode.
Ganga's oblations who consigns,
Salvation gets, with Me combines.

Who serve guileless and nothing want,
Lord Shiva shall My devotion grant
The bridge we made here one who sees,
Shall cross Life's sea with greatest ease.

Nala, Neel made great bridge on Rama's Name,
In three worlds spread their glorious fame;
The rocks which sink and others drown,
To float by themselves earn renown.

This is no wonder of the sea,
Rock's nature, vanars might can't be.

By Rama's Splendour upon the sea, huge rocks floated steady and calm,
Folly forsooth to serve a lord, other than Lord of Mercy Rama. 3

Hearing the words of the Lord, sages were filled with joy and returned to their ashrams singing of the glory of the Lord.

2. THE VANAR ARMY LANDS IN LANKA

Rama stepped on the wondrous and strong bridge made by Nal and Neel. He gazed upon the wide expanse of the ocean and the vast numbers of snakes, crocodiles and reptiles that sported around the tossing waves. He then ordered the vanar army to move over the bridge. The warriors surged forward in great jubilation and so eager were they to cross over that it appeared that the bridge built by them would be too narrow. Many of the vanars thereupon dived into the waters and many others soared into the air leaping ahead of each other in reckless abandon. 4

They reached the shore of Lanka tired and hungry.

As they across the ocean arrived,
The merry vanars to Rama cried:
"Lord give us leave to fruits enjoy!"
As Rama smiled, vanars ran with joy.

The stately trees they quickly climbed,
Laden with fruits of many kinds.
They ate fruit in good mirthful glee,
Threw stones at Lanka in their spree!

If demon happened to come near,
Encircling him they'd shout and jeer;
Quickly biting his nose or ear,
Stopping when he would shake with fear!

Demons who lost a ear or nose,
Scampered to Ravana with their woes.
Bridging of ocean when he heard,
Ravana exclaimed in wonder stirred:

"Have they bridged the swirling waters, waves and currents of the sea!
Waters carrying streams and rivers, mighty ocean! Can it be?" 5

Ravana then smiled to mask his fear,
And left the court his mind to cheer.
Mandodari told that Lanka's soil,
Rama's army had reached without toil;

Brought Ravana to her palace room,
And spoked words calm to avert doom.

She begged of him, bowing to his feet:
"O darling mine! My words now heed!

Pray seek to challenge only one,
Who can by strength or guile be won.
'Gaints Rama you cannot power's race run,
You're different like glow worm and sun.

Who killed Madhu and Kaitab once,
Then vanquished Diti's valiant sons;
Who slew Sahasrabahu, Bali killed,
To help gods bridge o'er ocean built;

My love such might do not oppose,
In whose power life death does repose.

Send Sita back to Rama I pray, and bow to His Lotus Feet,
Kingdom bestow upon our son, to woods let us retreat. 6

Rama gives shelter to those who seek,
Tigers do not attack the meek.
Your deeds of valour you have done,
Victory o'er gods and demons won.

The learned say that in old age,
Kings should abode in forests take.
There let us on Him meditate.
Who Does, Destroys and Creates.

Lord! leave desire of sense pleasure,
Be calmly engrossed in prayer.
For Whom great sages concentrate,
Kings abdicate and renunciate;

That Rama, Lord of the human race,
Comes to Lanka to bestow grace,
If love, to my words you will heed,
In all three worlds will shine your deed!"

Thus imploring, tears streaming, trembling, clasping feet she sighed,
"Husband! if you seek Rama's Mercy, your love I'll not be denied." 7

Ravana proud his queen embraced,
Tales of his vain glory traced.
"Love! your fears are without cause,
Brave like me is there or was?

Varuna, Kubera, Wind and Death,
None could win me when we met.
Sway I hold o'er gods and men,
Why my love do you fear then?"

With many words Mandodari tried,
But he withdrew, reason denied.
She knew then in her sorrowing heart,
Ridden with pride, death would him part.

3. PRAHASTA'S ADVICE TO RAVANA

After spurning Mandodari's advice and prayers to abstain from seeking conflict with Rama, Ravana returned to his court to plan the course of war with the enemy. His ministers, flattered their king, smiled scornfully and said: "This is no serious matter for us to ponder over. Men and vanars will only provide for the appetites of our demons!"

Hearing their boastful words, Ravana's son Prahasta arose to speak, he said: "Nothing, O king, should be done thoughtlessly. These ministers are only performing lip service and flattering their monarch. Mere empty words will not lead us anywhere. A single vanar had leapt across the ocean. His deeds of valour still send a shiver of fear through our people."

Addressing the ministers he asked: "Were none of your demons hungry then? Why did they not capture him and devour him when he set about to burn their homes and the beautiful city of Lanka?"

The ministers sat in uneasy silence. Prahasta then spoke to Ravana: "These foolish ministers give you advice that is sweet to hear but will have a bitter end. He who has had a bridge constructed across the ocean without effort and whose army camps fearlessly on Subel hills is no ordinary human being whom you may just capture and eat! All these ministers are merely boasting without realising the greatness of the power of the one who comes to Lanka today".

Prahasta implored his father, "O king! Give serious thought to my words. Do not take me to be a coward. There are millions of people who can talk and listen to sweet words but few who can speak and hear bitter truths."

"Hearken to me, my father. Send your envoy to Rama with an offer to return Sita to him and seek friendship with him. If he returns to Ayodhya with Sita after accepting your proposals for peace, it would be futile to engage in war. If he spurns your offer, we shall fight him with determination." 9

"Father, if you accept my advice, glory shall be yours in both ways; in our offer for peace as well as in our determination to fight."

This talk of peace enraged Ravana: "O foolish son!" he hissed contemptuously, "who has taught you such cowardice? Even before we fight you are afflicted with fear! You are, a defeatist!"

Prahasta could not bear to hear his father's harsh words. Sorely distressed he went back to his palace after warning his father bitterly that the end of the demons drew near.

Prahasta's warning had no effect on Ravana who was intoxicated with the pride of his power.

He rose from court as drew the night,
Dwelling upon twenty arms might.
To palace went on Lanka's peak
Where Ravana dancing company keeps.

He sat there heart's anguish to ease,
Kinnars sing glories king to please,
Lilting tunes drums and veena played,
Apsaras danced in sensuous gaits.

Like million Indra's he keeps engaged in lustful sports galore,
He feared not, neither did he care, his foes were at his door. 10

4. RAVANA'S CROWN FALLS TO THE GROUND

Meanwhile as the day ended and Mount Subel was enveloped in darkness, Rama lay on a bed of soft leaves and flowers lovingly prepared by Lakshmana. Sugriva and Angad gently massaged the Lord's feet and Lakshmana stood guard with his bow and arrows, standing near the Lord.

Thus rested Rama, the Merciful Lord, Abode of Beauty and Qualities
Blessed are the men who are engrossed in this vision of the Lord. 11a

The Lord saw the moon rise, as he gazed upon the eastern sky,
He said: "Behold the lovely moon, like tiger fearless rising high! 11b

Dwelling in caves of eastern hills,
With glamour strength and power filled;
The moon in dark skies boldly fares,
In woods like tiger elephant dares.

Like pearls the stars in sky shine bright,
Like Jewels grace a face by night.
O friends! what is the moon's dark spot,
Tell me according to your thought!"

Sugriva said: "this is what I feel,
Earth's shadow does the moon reveal",

One said: "Rahu had hit moon hard.
The hurt it carries in its heart".

Another said: "To Rati make,
Brahma did from moon its beauty take.
A hole was left in moon forlorn,
Through which we see the sky beyond."

Rama said: "Methinks moon poison likes,
And its dark form within it hides;
Lovers who grieve in partings plight,
Can feel its sting in its cool light."

Hanuman said: "O Gracious Lord! Devoted is the moon to You,
The sky blue beauty of Your Form, it keeps within its silver hue!" 12a
The Lord of Benign Mercy smiled, hearing Hanuman's devoted views,
Then to Vibhishana by his side, turned towards Lanka thus did muse: 12b

"Look yonder at the southern sky,
Amidst bright lightning dark clouds fly,
Persistent is the thunder low,
Does this coming of hailstorm show?"

"This is not lightning Lord" he said,
"Nor is the sky with clouds beset.
In a palace built on Lanka's peaks,
Proud Ravana dancing company keeps.

O'er Ravana's head the canopy dark,
Like black clouds Lanka's skyline marks;
Gems that adorn Mandodari's ears,
Like bright flash of lightning appears;

What comes like rumbling thunder's sound,
Is music while girls dance around."
Rama smiled, and picking up his bow,
Strung arrow Ravana's pride to blow.

By a single arrow from his bow, crown, canopy with her ear gems fell,
All saw this happen but how struck no one could perceive nor could tell.
13a

The arrow that the Lord had aimed, into his quiver swiftly came.
This evil omen as they saw, the merry makers quiet became. 13b

There was no tremor, nor a storm,
No arms they saw of any form.
Within themselves all were immersed,
No evil omen could be worse.

Finding his people ill at ease,
Ravana laughed loud to them appease:
"For whom severed heads falling down,
Are omens good, what if falls crown?

Go to your beds, lose not your peace!"
Thus did the merry making cease.

When ear rings fell upon the floor,
Mandodari went to him implore:

With folded hand, eyes filled with tear,
"My love" she said, "my prayer do hear!
Darling! in strife with Rama relent,
Think not Him human, folly bent.

Rama is the Omnipresent God, pray take as true my words,
In every limb of His body, Vedas say reside the worlds. 14

Feet lower worlds, head Brahma's abode,
Limbs in between, worlds others hold.
Play of His eyebrows fate dispense,
His eyes the sun, hair clouds intense.

His nostrils: Ashwini's twin sons,
As He blinks eye, day ends night comes.
His ears: Heaven's ten posts Vedas sing,
Veda is His speech, His breath the wind.

Digpals: arms strength; His mouth is flame,
His lips consume, teeth Death proclaim.
Maya His smile, water His tongue,
Life's birth and end from Him are sprung.

His body's hair Nature contains,
Hills are his bones, rivers His veins.
His belly oceans, hind part Hell,
His Form Infinite none can tell.

His conscience Shiva, Brahma Knowledge is, the moon His mind and Vishnu's soul,
That Lord of life of Universe, out of His Will a form does hold. 15a
Consider this, love of my heart, to seek strife from Him cease,
And save for us our married life, bow to Rama's Lotus Feet." 15b

Ravana laughed scornfully on hearing his queen. He derided her thus: "It is truly said that the eight evil qualities of covetousness, untruth,

coquetry, wile, fear, ignorance, impurity and cruelty reside in a woman! You have tried to frighten me by praising the enemy."

"O darling! I command the whole world!" Wilfully choosing to misunderstand the words of his queen, he added: "I now understand that you are recounting the power of qualities that I possess?

"O beauty of fawn-like eyes! Your words are deep. They are sweet to hear and they destroy fear!"

Mandodari then knew that nothing would deter her arrogant husband from his grievous error. But she spent the night imploring him to hearken to her advice though she knew it was in vain.

In the morning Ravana went to his court, intoxicated in the vainglory of his pride. 16a

Says Tulsi, even if nectar rains from heaven, cane bushes will not bear blossoms or fruit. So too an ignorant man will not perceive wisdom, even if he has a guru like Bramha. 16b

5. RAMA SENDS ANGAD TO LANKA AS HIS ENVOY

Meanwhile, Rama called his ministers of war on Mount Subel to plan out their future action. Jambwan suggested that they should first send an envoy to Lanka to negotiate for a peaceful settlement. He proposed that Angad be sent to Ravana's Court.

Jambwan's advice was accepted. Rama called Angad and said : "O son of Bali! you are endowed with strength and wisdom. Go to Lanka for my work. I do not need to give you detailed instructions and I have full confidence in your diplomatic ability, talk to the demon king in a way that our purpose is fulfilled and assure him that we wish him no harm if he accedes to our terms.

Angad bowed to the Lord and said: "I am indeed honoured, O Lord, for having been selected for this work. Your commands shall be fulfilled."17

As Angad entered Lanka, he was challenged by Ravana's son. Even as they talked, hot words ensued and they were engaged in a bitter quarrel. Losing his temper, Ravana's son tried to kick Angad viciously but Angad deftly caught his leg and the mighty demon fell to the ground.

Seeing his towering body crash, other demons who were watching the encounter ran helter-skelter. There was wide-spread confusion in the city. Word went around that the vanar who had burnt the city had returned.

Angad reached Ravana's palace and announced his name and purpose of visit. Ravana laughed aloud and asked for him to be brought in. "Let us see what sort of a vanar now comes", he said derisively.

Demon attendants of the court brought the mighty vanar warrior to Ravana.

Ravana to Angad thus did seem,
As if a mound of soot was seen.

His arms like trees, heads peaks immense,
His body hair like creepers dense.
His mouth, his ears, his nose and eyes,
Like caves and chasms in hill sides.

Angad strode with unfaltering pace,
Of fear in him there was no trace
All stood to greet the warrior brave,
Ravana raged at honour they gave.

Amidst a herd of elephants wild, as fearless tiger springs,
So Angad came in Ravana's court, in heart Rama's thought did bring. 19

"Who are you vanar?" Ravana stormed,
"I'm Rama's envoy" Angad informed.
"Of your friend Bali I am son,
For your welfare I therefore come.

Pulastya your grandsire, of clan great,
Both to Shiva and Brahma you have prayed;
By boons you have from them received.
O'er kings and lokpals sway achieved.

In kingdom's pride, or passion wrought,
World's Mother Sita, you have brought.
Hearken to me, back Sita give,
Rama will for sure your sin forgive.

Lay down your arms amends to make,
Your queens and family with you take.
And Sita bring with honour due,
Thus go to Rama I beseech you.

Proceed and seek the Lord's Mercy "O shelter me!" beseech,
The Lord will rid you of your fear, hearing your humble speech." 20

Fumed Ravana: "Vanar's son, beware!
To talk thus to gods' foe you dare?
Speak of your father and of your name,
In what way do you friendship claim?"

"I'm Angad, Bali's son" he said,
"Have you my father ever met?"
Ravana faltered at Angad's words,
Then said: "Of Bali I have heard.

Angad! are you that Bali's son?
For your own clan flame to become?
Ere birth in womb you should have died,
Of hermit's envoy you claim pride!

Does Bali in good health abide?"
Angad then smiled and thus replied:
"Soon you yourself your friend will clasp,
His welfare you may yourself ask!

Of seeking strife with Rama the fate,
He will himself to you relate.
Doubts only in him can abide,
In whom Lord Rama does not reside.

Forsooth you're shelterer of your clan and I am my own family's blot,
With twenty ears and eyes you say what e'en one blind would utter not." 21

"Shiva, Brahma and other sages great,
Upon Whose Feet for ever wait;
His envoy, name of his clan stakes!
Indeed your wisdom you forsakes!"

Hearing Angad's harsh bitter words,
Ravana's eyes glared in anger stirred:
"O knave! with you I patience show,
Because of custom dharma I know."

Said Angad: "I know dharma you seek,
Another's wife you captive keep!
Envoys respect I myself see,
If such is dharma, death better be!

Your maimed sister when you had seen,
You challenged not, dharma was so keen!
All know your dharma of which you sing,
Today to meet you Fate me brings!"

"O vanar! stop thy senseless talk" said Ravana, "of my arms see might!
Like Rahu eclipses the moon, Of Lokpals they have been the plight! 22a
You've heard how with my sinewy arms, Kailash with Shiva I Lifted,
Like swan upon lake of the sky, in calm repose they rested. 22b

Listen Angad! In army thine,
Is there e'en one to match strength mine?

For his lost wife thy master weeps,
His forlorn brother company keeps!

Sugriva and you! river bank's trees,
Cowardice has Vibhishana seized;
Jambwan is broken down with age,
Can he now battle's fury face?"

"Nal and Neel are mere artisans" continued Ravana, belittling the might of the vanar warriors. "There is of course one amongst you" he conceded, "who came before you who is of might and who set fire to Lanka."

"O king of demons" interrupted Angad, "did he really set fire to Lanka while your demon warriors stood by helplessly?"

"O Ravana! the one you praise as a vanar of great valour is only a small servant and messenger of Sugriva!"

"Did he truly set fire to your city witnout the commands of the Lord? Forsooth it appears he did not return to Sugriva out of fear and he hides somewhere! 23a

Ravana! you speak the truth and I am not angered on hearing your words. Indeed there is no warrior in our army who will attain glory by fighting you. 23b

Custom ordains that love and hate should be amongst equals. If a tiger kills a frog, will anyone praise the tiger?"

"Wondrous indeed is your strength" he continued sarcastically, "that you allowed Hanuman to destroy your Ashoka gardens and burn your city to ashes! But I know some Ravanas who have suffered similar indignities. I know of one Ravana who went to the underworld to vanquish Bali but his children kept him captive in horses stables; a Ravana was captured by Sahasrabahu and was released only on intervention by sage Pulastya; a Ravana I know, though I am embarrassed to say so, was held captive by Bali under his armpit! I wonder if you are the same Ravana?"

Ravana fumed with rage as he thundered;

"O fool know me of might intense,
Mount Kailash knows my strength immense;
Shiva knows my heart fearless and brave.
To whom in prayer my heads I gave.

My heads, like lotus, with sword's blade,
I cut of times for Shiva and prayed.
Fool! my great strength the Digpals feel,
Who even now by its might reel!

Elephants who support earth's weight,
Know something of my power great.
With them in fury when I clashed,
Like radish their big tusks were bashed.

At whose stride even earth does rock,
Like boat on which elephants flock;
I am that Ravana of renown,
Have you not heard of me O clown?"

"O ignorant one!" continued Ravana, "you talk of the strength of humans before the might of my arms? I have indeed fathomed the shallowness of your knowledge!"

Angad blazed within his heart hearing Ravana boast of his might. "O proud king!" he exclaimed. "Consider well what you say. You call such a one a mere human by whose power Parashurama lost his pride. The Parashurama whose mighty axe slew Sahasrabahu and humbled many a kings! O ignorant one! Is Rama a mere human? Is Kamadeva a mere archer? Is Ganga a mere river? Is Kamadhenu a mere beast? Is the wish granting tree a mere tree? Is charity limited to alms of a few grains? Is nectar a mere liquid? Is devotion to Rama a fruit akin to other fruits of life? The one who humbled your pride with that of your army, who devastated the Ashoka gardens, burnt Lanka and killed your son, none could dare challenge him: is Hanuman a mere vanar? Pray to Lord Rama before the fury of his fiery arrows consume the demon race!"

Ravana was filled with rage. "O ignorant vanar!" he fumed, "you do not know my might:

Kumbhakarna great is brother mine, Indra's vanquisher my son,
Do you of my famed glory know? The whole world I have won! 27

Fool! with vanars friendship to claim,
And ocean bridge, is this his fame?
The seas are crossed by many birds!
This is no might! Mine have you heard?

My arms with ocean's might abound,
In which gods and humans have drowned.
Like twenty oceans lashing toss,
Is warrior born to sail across?

Digpals for me did water bring.
O fool! you sing strength of a king!
If master yours of whom you speak,
Had strength and might to battle seek;

Why does he to me envoy send,
Ashamed not to his enemy bend?
Arms that churned Kailash first behold,
Then your Lord's might seek to unfold!

Who is as mighty as Ravana who cut his head with his own hands,
For offerings to the sacred fire, this Gauri's Lord Shiva understands. 28

As skulls glowed in the fire's bed,
God's message on foreheads I read.
Death by a human they foretold,
I laughed! could one kill Ravana bold!

That moment's thought bears me no fright,
Weakened with age Bramha thus did write.
Fool! you manners and shame renounce,
'Fore me a warrior's strength announce!"

Sneered Angad: "In the realms of Shame
None other like you bears the fame!
Shame doth forsooth your nature frame,
You boast not even of your name!

Mind obsessed by Kailash and heads,
These deeds twenty times you have said;
Might of those arms you do not show
Which Bali, Sabhu challenge threw!

Hearken! stop now this talk unwise,
By cutting heads doth valour rise?
Valour comes not by Maya's spell,
Though heads one may by himself fell.

Reflect in mind, insects to flame by their own folly are misled,
Asses carry amazing loads, but are these deeds of valour said? 29

Do not senseless talk longer draw,
Hearken to me, from Pride withdraw.
I'm Rama's envoy, not peace to find,
But to convey thoughts of Rama's mind."

Repeatedly thus Rama doth say:
"Is tiger famed jackal to slay?
Rama's precept this keeps me unstirred
To calmly hear your arrogant words.

Or else your haughty face I'd break,
Sita from here by my might take.
God's foe! thy might I had then known,
When you stole Sita while alone.

You're demons' king of haughty nerves,
I am envoy of Rama who serves.
If I feared not Rama's fame to taint,
My might to you I would acquaint.

Throwing you on ground, ravage your lands, your warriors I would slay,
O fool! with maidens of your court, Rama's Sita lead away. 30

Doing this no glory I would claim,
To kill the vanquished bears no fame.
The crooked, miser, fool, lustfilled,
Infamous, wretched, wrath instilled;

Much aged, selfish, who denounce,
Sinners, who Vishnu Vedas renounce,
The infirm to long suffering lead,
Awhile alive they are like dead.

Considering this I let you live,
To anger me cause do not give."
Hearing Angad, king wrath inflamed,
Gnashed teeth, clenching his hands exclaimed:

"Low vanar now your death you seek,
Of lowly birth, big words you speak;
Vanar! the strength which you proclaim,
Lacks strength and wisdom, glory, fame."

Of body, mind, he qualities lacks, so father banished him to woods,
He fears strength of my mighty arms, distracted for his wife he looks. 31

Angad could not restrain himself when he heard Ravana insulting Rama. Quivering with rage he struck his fist upon the ground. The earth shook as he did so and the ministers seated around fell backwards. Ravana was jostled on his throne and his crowns fell to the ground. As the king's attendants hastened to pick them up, Angad gathered four of the crowns and threw them out of window towards Mount Subel where they fell at Rama's feet.

Then Angad spoke in great fury. "O twenty armed demon king! Know the might of Rama by the strength of his envoy! I place my foot upon the ground and challenge your demon warriors to lift it off. If they can displace it, we shall accept defeat and return without Sita!"

Depending upon the power of the Lord, Angad placed his foot forward firmly upon the ground and looked around challengingly.

Ravana haughtily ordered his demon warriors to lift Angad's foot and throw him out of the window. Mighty demons came one by one to try but returned to their seats hanging their heads in shame. Even Ravana's gallant son, the mighty Indrajit tried his strength, but could not stir Angad's foot set firmly upon the ground!

Then shouting in rage, the mighty Ravana stood up himself. As he approached Angad to grasp his foot, Angad said: "O king! clasp not my feet! Why do you not hearken to me and clasp the Feet of the One Who will redeem your sin". Thus humiliated, Ravana retraced his steps to his throne.

As he sat silently, Angad again advised him to send back Sita and seek peace with Rama. But Ravana remained sullenly silent and Angad knew that he was determined to cause doom of his own family and that of demons of Lanka.

"I know now", he warned as he turned to depart, "that your end shall come on the battlefields of Lanka!"

Ravana and his ministers had no answer to Angad's threat which he uttered in the Name of the Lord. They sat silently as Angad departed from Lanka. 35a

When Ravana returned to his palace, Mandodari again begged him to come to terms with Rama after sending back Sita: 35b

"Reflect my love, false hopes don't place,
'Twixt Rama and you, war has no grace.
When his brother a small line drew,
Helpless you stood, though strong were you.

With playful ease he ocean rode,
With fearless steps in Lanka strode.
O love! can you in battle hold,
Whose messenger did acts so bold!

He killed watchmen, gardens lay waste,
Akshaya he slew, moving with haste.
Lanka he burnt just in a trice,
What is now left for boastful pride?

Husband! now from vainglory part,
My words a little take to heart.
Think not of Rama as human king,
The mighty Lord of every thing.

Mareech some power of Rama's bow knew,
E'en his advice in pride you threw.
In Janaka's court thronged kings of strength,
In your pride's might, you also went.

Stringing Shiva's bow Rama Sita wed,
Why did you not wage battle then?
Indra's son Jayanta too knew His might,
Losing an eye, he took to flight
Surpnakha's state you yourself saw,
E'en then good council do not draw?

Who killed Viradh, Khara and Dushana, who slew Kabandh with utmost ease,
Whose single arrow Bali killed; love, think of his mighty power please! 36

Who bridged the ocean just in play,
To Subel led his men to stay;
That Lord did on you Mercy take,
Sending an envoy for your sake.
Your might in your court he did crush,
Like tiger does on elephants' rush.
Whose soldiers Angad, Hanuman brave,
Are mighty warriors of strength great.

To call him human you insist,
In greed and pride in vain persist.
O love! 'gainst Rama in strife you rise,
Bound by the fates of ruin unwise.

Doom does not need a rod to wend,
Dharma reason wisdom strength does end.
Husband! near whom doom looms about,
His mind like yours is wrought with doubt.
Two sons have died, the city burnt, e'en now consider well,
O husband mine! win high renown, let heart in Lord Rama dwell!" 37

Mandodari, with tears in her eyes begged him to desist. But he remained doggedly adamant in his resolve to keep Sita in captivity even if it meant the end of the demon race.

6. THE WAR OF LANKA: FIRST BATTLE

When Angad returned to Rama on Mount Subel, he narrated his adventures in Lanka and how Ravana had spurned their offer for peace. 38

"O son of Bali!" said Rama, "I am anxious to know how you managed to get four of the crowns of the great demon king whose immense strength is famed throughout the world."

"O All-knowing Lord! Bestower of Peace upon Thy devotees! Hearken!" exclaimed Angad. "Consider them not to be four crowns of the demon king that I threw at Thy Feet, but the four qualities of royalty!"

"O Lord, the Vedas say that conciliation, charity, justice and discernment are four royal prerogatives. Ravana has proved to be unworthy of these glowing aspects of dharma and sovereign customs. They therefore forsook his crowned heads and came to Thee of their own accord!"

"Ravana spurned his royal dharma and now moves towards the jaws of death. These four qualities therefore leave him and lay themselves at Thy Gracious Feet, O Lord!"

Rama smiled at Angad's meaningful words and the great vanar warrior then proceeded to describe the strength of the demon armies and outlined the defences of Lanka.

Lanka's strength when from Angad known.
Rama called his men to plan their own.
"Lanka's defences are four forts,
How to attack and split our force?"

Then Sugriva, Jambwan and Vibhishana,
Planned out their action with devotion.
Divisions four of their men made,
Each fort of Lanka to invade.

A warrior for each force they named,
Each brave and for his valour famed.
With Rama's blessings they weapons bore,
Like tigers brave, allegiance swore.

Towards Lanka with zeal they sailed,
'Victory to Rama!' they loudly hailed.

Though knowing that Lanka's forts were strong,
Inspired by Rama they marched along.
The forts surrounding in a flash,
They challenged demon foes to clash!

Like tigers brave of mighty strength they challenged raising up their arm,
'Victory to Lakshmana and Sugriva! Hail victory to our Gracious Rama!'
39

Their challenge put demons to fright,
But Ravana spoke in haughty pride:

"How dare the vanars show such cheeks!"
He smiled and called his army chiefs.

"The vanars are by death here lured,
Demons have hunger long endured!
You get unasked what you had tried!"
Said Ravana laughing in his pride.

"O my brave demons! Surge forth there!
Catch vanars for your hunger's fare!"
His pride was like the *titwi* birds,
Which to reach sky, keeps feet upwards.

Tempted thus, demons quickly picked,
Sharp daggers, swords and pointed sticks.
Club, lance, a bow or deadly spear,
Stone, rock or what they found was near.

Like vultures swarming on red stones,
Taking them to be flesh and bones;
Caring not if their beaks would break,
Thus sped demons their lives to take.

With numerous weapons, bows and arrows, filling air with battle's calls,
They strode up forts and in their fury climbed upon the massive walls. 40

On battlements the demons proud,
Looked like on Mount Sumera clouds.
Martial music was played on pipes,
Stirring the demons brave to fight.

The trumpets fanfare, beat of drums,
Left meek and cold hearted benumbed.

Below the forts bears vanars bold,
Surged on looking like coal and gold.
They raced up on steep tricky slopes,
Breaking hillsides and making roads.

Millions of them clattered and shrieked,
Pulling out rocks clenching their teeth.
Stones and arrows in battle soared,
Some 'Rama' hailed, others 'Ravana' roared.

Demons with peaks vanars attacked,
They catch them deftly, throw them back.

Huge bears and vanars take large rocks, on Lanka's fort they aim and throw,
They jump and catch the demons' legs, fell them on ground and back they go.
Spritely vanars and mighty bears, quickly upon the fort's walls spring,
They storm the palaces built inside, the Glory of Lord Rama they sing.
Each vanar then a demon caught and to the fort's wall rushed,
From battlement to ground they jumped and demons' bodies' crushed. 41

By Rama's might vanars ran in groups,
And crushed thousands of demon troops.
Again to fort they leaping come,
Hailing Rama's might like dazzling sun.

In haste demons run crying aloud,
Like winds disperse dense gathering clouds;
In Lanka great confusion rose,
As women children wailed in woes.

They curse the king in bitter words:
'He has called Death by pride bestirred'.
When Ravana heard his troops returned,
He sent them back, in anger burned.

Ravana was furious. "Whosoever flees from battle" he warned, "shall meet with death at my hands."

"O thankless demons" he roared, "you have enjoyed untold pleasures by my powers and now life is so dear to you that you flee from battle?"

Hearing their angry king and ashamed at their cowardice, the demons returned to fight the vanars determined to vanquish them. They attacked so viciously that the vanars were completely shaken.

Hanuman was at that moment engaged in combat at the southern gate with the great warrior Meghnad, son of Ravana. As soon as word came to him that demons had attacked vanars in great numbers and had overpowered them, he leapt upon the battlements and dropped a huge rock upon Meghnad. The demon warrior's chariort was broken and another charioteer swiftly carried Meghnad away to his palace.

Hanuman continued to attack with great might and ultimately the demon army was scattered. Seeing Hanuman scaling the fort, Angad surged ahead and both of them stormed fearlessly towards Ravana's palace. They climbed upon its roof and proclaimed victory for Rama. In great jubilation they pushed the glistening golden domes of the palace till they broke away from the bui!ding and toppled down upon the ground below.

They roared and jumped amidst the demon troops, killing vast numbers of their warriors. Kicking them viciously and felling them by hard hitting blows, they warn: 'This is the fruit of not praying to Rama.'

They crushed one demon against the other and plucking out their heads, throw them towards Ravana's palace. As they fall at the proud demon king's feet, the skulls break like earthen pitchers. 44

Thereafter the vanar heroes joyfully returned to Rama. The sun had set and the commanders bowed before Rama. Disgruntled at their defeat however, the demons suddenly chased the vanars attacking them after dusk, thus breaking the accepted rules of warfare:

At dusk when Rama's army came back,
Demons from rear rushed to attack.
The vanars were then unprepared,
But turned to fight in anger flared.

Brave warriors picking arms to fight,
Attacked demons with all their might.
Arrows came speeding from demons,
With deadly spears and sharp weapons;

On both sides warriors of great skill,
Fought bravely with determined will.

Like thundering clouds in gusty sky,
By winds towards each other fly;
So raged the battle grim and fierce
Each trying the others ranks to pierce.

But in a moment all was dark,
Blood flowed as demons found their mark.

The vanars were disheartened then, falling against each other,
As darkness grew all around them, they challenged one another. 46

Cause of confusion Lord Rama knew,
He called Angad way out to show.
Hearing the demons' cunning plan,
Hanuman, Angad in fury ran.

Rama smiled seeing his brave vanars go,
A flaming arrow strung to bow.
As it flew darkness was repelled,
Like doubts by learning are dispelled.

By arrows light the vanars rushed,
With rocks the demons' bodies crushed,

Hanuman and Angad joined the fray,
Seeing them the demons turned away.

Vanars the fleeing demons caught,
With skilful art their end they wrought.
Tossed them in ocean by their feet,
For crocodiles and fish to eat.

Many demons were killed or maimed, others ran back in haste,
Speeding behind them vanars brave, the fleeing demons chased. 47

When it was dark again, all four divisions of the vanar armies returned to Rama. The Lord blessed them and spoke to them in gentle words. So jubilant were the vanar soldiers that they were no longer weary and found new strength in their tired limbs.

The vanars waited impatiently for dawn to break so that they could resume hostilities against the demons.

7. THE SECOND BATTLE: MEGHNAD FIGHTS LAKSHMANA

Next morning Ravana hurriedly summoned his ministers and asked them to plan the strategy of attack for the day. All of them knew that they had suffered heavy losses.

Aged Malyavanta, father of Ravana's mother, said: "Hearken to me son! Misfortune has fallen upon Lanka since you held Sita in captivity. No one has found peace in opposing Rama. The Vedas and Puranas sing of His Glory. The Lord Who slew the brothers Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyakshya and the great warriors Madhu and Kaitab has taken birth again. 48a

How can such a one be opposed who is like Death to vice, and is the abode of qualities; one who is esteemed by Shiva and Brahma. 48b

Therefore son, send Sita back to Rama; make truce with him and save the demon race."

Ravana angered as he heard his aged relative advising him to return Sita to Rama. "Blacken your face" he roared disrespectfully, "and get out of my sight."

The great warrior Meghnad then stood up and declared that he would teach a lesson to the enemy:

Then proudly Meghnad thus did speak:
"By sunset they shall face defeat!"
Hearing his son, Ravana was pleased,
Praising his strength his mind was eased.

While thus they boasted they were told,
In vast numbers came vanars bold.

Attacking forts, calling to fight,
Putting Lanka's demons to fright.

Atop the forts then warriors flocked,
Aiming at vanars spears and rocks.

They hurled down stones and other arms as vanars scaled the walls.
Shells burst like lightning, like thunder were demons' warlike calls.
The brave vanars their bodies hurt, did not give up to fight,
They picked up stones to kill demons flinging them with their might.
When Meghnad heard that the vanars bold again to Lanka's fort had come,
The warrior brave set forth to fight heralded by a beating drum. 49

"Of Kaushal where are brothers two,
Archers renowned all the world through.
Sugriva, Nal and Neel, where are they,
Angad, Hanuman o'er might who sway.

Where is Vibhishana: brother's foe,
Others and him death's door I'll show."
He strung arrows with venom full,
Bow string to ear in wrath did pull.

A shower of deadly arrows sent.
As if each was a winged serpent.
Vanars were falling everywhere,
To face him no one then could dare.

All bears and vanars took to flight,
Such mighty one none dared to fight.
No bear or vanar was there left,
Who was not of courage bereft.

The warrior brave then thundered forth like tigers loud and frightening sound,
At each ten fiery arrows aimed, bears vanars running fell to ground. 50

Seeing vanars in large numbers die,
Like Death Itself, Hanuman did fly.
A large rock from the earth he drew,
And swiftly at Meghnad it threw.

Meghnad aside did deftly leap,
His horse and chariot buried deep.
Hanuman challenged again to fight,
But he withdrew knowing well his might.

The warrior then to Lord Rama came,
Challenging him trying to inflame.
The might of his weapons employed,
Which without effort Rama destroyed.

Seeing all his weapons aimed in vain,
Meghnad returned o'ercome with shame.

Distressed at his failure in vanquishing Rama, Meghnad fought the vanars with dextrous skill. He confounded them with deft manoeuvres appearing to rise into the skies and showering burning coals upon them. Streams of water appeared to rise from the ground below. All around voices of goblins and witches appeared to screech: 'Cut and kill!' Blood flowed in torrents and bones lay heaped upon the battlefield. Amidst flying rocks and dust it became so dark that visibility vanished.

Rama saw his warriors terrified and aimed a deadly arrow at the formidable demon which made him end his dreadful manoeuvres. Lakshmana seeing the destruction wrought by the demon warrior, sought Rama's permission to engage in combat with the mighty Meghnad.

Taking the blessings of the Lord, Lakshmana with bow and arrows went,
With Angad and his warriors brave, he met Meghnad in fury bent. 52

His eyes were red, broad was his chest,
Fair like Himanchal, full of zest.
Brave demons also came to fight,
Hailing ten headed Ravana's might.

With stones and sticks that were their arms,
The vanars leapt shouting: "Hail Rama!"
Each vanar with a demon clashed,
Both grimly set, each other bashed.

The vanars kicked them with their feet,
Shouting, they bit them with their teeth.
'Catch and kill them! Don't spare!' they said,
'Pull out their limbs and break their head!'

The air was full of battle's din,
On ground lay many a torn out limb.
The gods above gazed on them fight,
Now holding breath, now in delight.

Dust covered pools of blood in pits, its redness seen in patches,
Like o'er a layer of burning coals, someone had sprinkled ashes. 53

Blood flowed profusely from deep wounds,
Like flowers red on dhak tree bloomed.
Brave Lakshmana gallant Meghnad fought,
Both warriors great in fury wrought.

But both the heroes stood their ground,
The battle royal held all spell bound.
Then Lakshmana in great fury filled,
Broke his chariot, its driver killed.

Thus fought the warriors battle grim,
Till Lakshmana's arrow wounded him.
Then thought the demon hero brave,
Charmed weapons only life could save.

A deadly arrow then he pressed,
Striking Lakshmana deep in his chest.
Brave Lakshmana swooned as his strength ebbed,
To claim him wounded Meghnad leapt.

Each mighty warrior tried in vain, in shame he hung his face,
How could the demons ever take one who holds earth in place! 54

The wrath of thousand fanged snake,
Of fourteen worlds can ashes make.
Served by all life beneath the sun,
Can such be e'er in battle won?

This can be only known by one,
Who is blessed by the Benign One.
As setting sun its shadows sent,
To their own comps the warriors went.

Bowing to the Lord vanars went past,
"Where is Lakshmana?" All-knowing Rama asked.
Lakshmana was then by Hanuman brought,
Seeing him Rama was in anguish wrought.

"Sushema can heal him", Jambwan said,
"But who from Lanka can him get?"
Said Son of Wind: "Disguised I'll dash,"
He brought back Sushema in a flash!

Sushema came bowing to the Lord and looked at Lakshmana's stricken state,
Naming a potent mountain herb, he asked Hanuman to bring with haste.55

Hanuman bowed to the Lord and exclaimed: "I hasten Lord, to fetch the herbs that will heal Lakshmana: By the strength of your power, I shall be back here before the sun rises!"

Taking the blessings of the Lord, Hanuman departed flying through the air.

8. HANUMAN'S ADVENTURES WHILE PROCURING THE HERBS

Ravana was happy to learn that Lakshmana had suffered grievous injuries as a result of his encounter with Meghnad. Soon however, he was told that Hanuman was proceeding to procure some herbs to heal Lakshmana.

The demon king hastened to Kalnemi, the magician. He apprised him with what had happened. Kalnemi tried to dissuade mighty Ravana: "Who can stop the great vanar who burnt the city of Lanka before our very eyes!" he exclaimed. "Pray to Rama and thus assure our welfare. Renounce your vainglory and ignorance of attachments. You sleep in the night of dismal ignorance. Awake! and give up all hopes of vanquishing one who holds sway over death!"

Ravana was furious and threatened Kalnemi with destruction by his own hands if he dared to disobey his orders. Knowing his end to be certain, Kalnemi chose to die by the hands of the messenger of the Lord and thus attain salvation. With a heavy heart he set out to try to stop Hanuman from proceeding to obtain the healing herbs.

By his magic he created a beautiful garden with a pool of water containing lovely blooms of lotus flowers. Hanuman saw the garden as he sped along and was tempted to rest awhile and to drink the cool waters of the pond before he proceeded on his journey. He stopped in the garden and saw an aged muni sitting under the shade of a tree, apparently engrossed in deep meditation. He was Kalnemi himself waiting for Hanuman to come.

Hanuman approached the disguised Kalnemi respectfully and sought permission to drink water from the pond to allay his thirst. The muni told him to drink of the waters to his heart's content and then to come back to him for his blessings.

As Hanuman reached the brink of the pool a crocodile nimbly caught his leg. Brave Hanuman lost no time in killing the beast. As the crocodile died it took its heavenly form and flew towards the sky. "O Vanar!" Hanuman heard it say, "seeing you, the curse of a sage upon my form has been lifted and I go to my heavenly abode. Beware of the one who sits disguised as a saint. He is a demon. Mark my words!"

Hanuman went back to the disguised demon. "Accept first my thanks

for the blessings you seek to give me!" he said. He flung the disguised demon upon the ground and as Kalnemi died he took the Name of the Lord.

Hanuman then continued his long journey ahd at last reached the mountain peak from which he had to collect the herb. He looked all around the dense foliage of shrubs growing there but could not recognize the herb he was required to take. He thereupon broke off the whole peak from the mountain and sped back quickly holding aloft the peak in his hand.

While he journeyed back to Lanka, he flew over the kingdom of Ayodhya. Bharat, who was sitting in Nandigram looked towards the sky and, seeing Hanuman with the peak in his hand, thought it was some demon speeding across the kingdom. He quickly strung an arrow to his bow and stretching bow string upto his ear he sent an arrow flying through the air at the figure passing across the skies.

Bharat's arrow Hanuman did wound,
'O Rama! O Rama!' he sighed and swooned,
His Lord's sweet name as Bharat heard,
He hied to Hanuman in love stirred.

In painful swoon seeing Hanuman lie,
Bharat to bring him round did try.
In distress deep his face grew pale,
With tears in eyes he thus did wail:

"The God that me from Rama's Feet turned,
Today with more grief has me burned.
If in speech, body and in mind,
My love for Rama guile does not bind;

And if my Rama is on me pleased,
May vanar rise affliction eased!"
These words of love as Bharat spoke,
Hailing Rama's Name Hanuman awoke.

In rapture Bharat Hanuman clasped, his body was aglow,
Tears streamed out from his lotus eyes, in heart Rama's love did glow. 59

Said Bharat: "Of Rama's welfare speak,
Do good health Sita, Lakshmana keep?"
Bharat sighed as Hanuman did state,
The course of war and Lakshmana's fate.

'O God!' he wept, 'I live in vain,
For Rama my life I have not lain!'
Knowing Hanuman's task brooked no delay,
He calmed his heart and thus did say:

"Brother you should no longer wait,
The morrow's dawn may be too late.
The hilltop hold, my arrow clasp,
To Lanka I will speed you fast."

Hearing him Hanuman swelled with pride,
'Can he send arrow me astride'
But of Rama's power when he thought,
His blessings, folding hands he sought.

"By thinking of your power" he said, "with ease I'll reach ere night,"
Taking his leave the vanar great vanished soon out of sight. 60a

Hanuman was pervaded with ecstasy as he sped forward, meditating upon the infinite love Bharat had for the Lord, and his bounteous nature.
Thus he hastened towards Lanka, faster than wind itself. 60b

9. LAKSHMANA RECOVERS

While Hanuman was engaged in these adventures, Rama lamented over Lakshmana as he continued to lie in a swoon:

Seeing Lakshmana as in swoon he slept,
The Gracious Rama like humans wept.
"Where is Hanuman, midnight has passed?"
Clasping Lakshmana in grief he asked.

"Brother! you could not see me sad!
Your tenderest love I always had.
You left your parents for my sake,
Rigours of woods with me to face.

Why do you not our love recall?
Why don't you rise hearing my call?
Of losing you if I'd known fear,
Forsaking words I'd not come here.

Sons, wife and family, riches glow,
In changing fortunes come and go.
But brother's love comes not again,
You know this yet sleeping remain!

As pines a bird losing its wings,
As grief to snake *mani's* loss brings;
Denied your life so would I live,
If life to me ill fate does give.

If I lose you and wife regain,
For me to go home will be vain.
Rather than shame I can bear blame,
Brother or wife, loss is the same.

O Lakshmana! now my grieving heart,
From wife and brother both shall part!
You are our mother's dearest son,
Dear to her heart, her life Lakshmana!

Knowing you devoted, to me kind,
She sent you with your hand in mine.
When I go back what shall I say?
Arise and tell me brother pray!"

Thus in emotion Rama appeared,
His Lotus eyes brimming with tears.
Rama! Inseparable! Who Universe keeps!
Depicted thus a human's griefs.

The vanars were greatly distressed, hearing Rama's sorrowing words,
With pleasure soon their faces lit, as Hanuman came with herbs. 61

With joy Rama did Hanuman embrace,
The All knowing Lord! Ocean of Grace!
Sushema herbs juices Lakshmana gave,
From slumber woke the warrior brave.

Rama clasped Lakshmana in joy entranced,
In mirthful glee the vanars danced!
Wise Hanuman then reached Sushema back,
Disguised in form, blinding his track.

Lakshmana's recovery was celebrated with great rejoicings in the vanar army. But when Ravana heard of the news he was sorely disappointed and despaired of victory.

He then resolved to go to his mighty brother Kumbhakarana and ask his help.

10. THE THIRD BATTLE: KUMBHAKARANA FIGHTS RAMA

Kumbhakarana was asleep when Ravana came to him. He had been granted a boon that he would sleep continuously for six months and it took Ravana tremendous effort to wake him before the great warrior had completed his full period of sleep.

Proud Ravana was with fury stirred.
Of Lakshmana's healing when he heard.
To Kumbhakarana he hied distressed,
To have the demon's woes redressed.

Arising he looked full of venom,
Like Death had taken form of demon.
He said: "O my great brother hail!
Why do you look so wan and pale?"

The demon king told him with pride,
How he had captured Rama's young bride.
"But vanars have brave demons killed,
Our leaders who in war were skilled.

Durmukha, Devantaka warriors great;
Atikaya, Akampan met death's fate.
Many warriors, our army's pride,
On Lanka's battlefield have died."

Hearing Ravana in distress sigh, Kumbhakarna mighty thus did speak:
"You've sinned against the Mother fool! how do you your own victory seek? 62

Why wake me now O demon king?
Your foolish act its woe shall bring!
Brother! do not be swayed by pride,
Pray and by Rama's Mercy abide!

Ravana! can mere human be Rama,
Who has devotee like Hanuman?
Your folly when you did not see,
You should have then awoken me.

O king! strife against whom you seek,
Brahma, Shiva crave His devotion deep.
Brother embrace me this last time,
I'll go and gaze at Eyes Divine!

His Lotus Eyes, His sky-blue Form,
Saviour of pains, Who world adorns!"

Thinking of His Graceful Form, in His devotion lost awhile,
To kill his conscience then he asked Ravana to send him casks of wine.63

With sumptuous eating and wine ploughed,
Like lightning sped, thundering aloud;

Seeking to fight in drunken heat,
Alone he fared the foe to meet.

Seeing him Vibhishana came to greet,
In deep respect fell to his feet.
Clasping him in his arms he raised,
Gently his deep devotion praised.

Vibhishana said: "Ravana spurned me,
For telling him what meet would be.
In sorrow then to Rama I came,
In my distress he mercy gave!"

Kumbhakarana said: "Ravana death seeks,
Good council now he does not heed.
You're blessed Vibhishana brother mine,
For your wisdom your name shall shine.

For demon clan you are the light,
Choosing path of devotion bright!

Brother give up wiles for ever, mind action speech in Rama attach,
In grip of Death I can no longer actions with discernment match. 64

Touching his feet Vibhishana went,
To Rama of three worlds adornment.
He said: "Lord! mighty as mountain,
Comes Kumbhakarana, valour's fountain!"

Seeing mighty Kumbhakarana come to fight,
Vanars attacked with all their might.
Pulling from earth huge rocks and trees,
Hurling at him grinding their teeth;

Vanars and bears sped forth in flocks,
Flinging at him deluge of rocks.
But Kumbhakarana stood unmoved and calm,
Like flowers an elephant cannot harm.

Seeing that the attack of the vanars was ineffective against the formidable demon warrior, Hanuman advanced towards Kumbhakarana and dealt him a vicious blow. The great warrior reeled but stood up again and struck Hanuman so powerfully that he lost consciousness. Then Kumbhakarana, wild with fury, caught Nal, Neel and other brave warriors of the vanar army and soon they also lay vanquished with grievous injuries. Fighting magnificently Kumbhakarna overwhelmed most of

the warriors and then rushed towards Sugriva, the vanar king.

With a mighty leap he caught Sugriva and pressed him so tightly against himself that Sugriva fainted.

From swoon woke Sugriva, hung his head,
And limply slid as if was dead.
Then in a flash struck ears and nose
And to the sky he quickly rose.

Catching vanar to ground he dashed,
Sugriva's fist then at demon crashed.
Quickly to Rama brave Sugriva hied,
'Hail! Hail! O lord!' in joy he cried.

Of broken nose and ears in shame
Kumbhakarna roared, in fury came.
Seeing frightful form sans ears and nose,
Vanars were filled with fear and woes.

'Victory to Rama!' they shouted then and ran in frenzy steeped,
Together at his body huge, aimed rocks and hefty trees. 66

In battle's valour demon glared,
In wrath like Death itself he fared.
Thousands of vanars swallowed whole,
Like locust fleeing into a hole.

Millions of vanars caught and crushed,
Millions 'neath feet he turned to dust.
Those he had swallowed in his wrath,
Through mouth ears nose found freedom's path.

Drunk in war's zeal with pride he glowed,
Like food for him God had bestowed.
Sans looking back the vanars flee,
They nothing hear and nothing see.

Kumbhakarna to rout vanars had forced,
Hearing this, demons ranks reinforced.
Rama saw his armies filled with woes,
While with new weapons came his foes.

To Vibhishana, Sugriva said Rama: "With Lakshmana armies hold,
I shall now myself see the might of evil warrior bold." 67

With bow in hand quiver at side,
To vanquish demon Rama then hied.

He struck the bow-string of his bow,
Its deafening sound stilled hearts of foes.

Ten thousand arrows Rama then sent,
They flew like deadly winged serpents;
All o'er the battlefield they sped,
Thousands of demons fell down dead.

Limbs, heads and chests dismembered lie,
Some sliced in hundred pieces fly;
Wounded collapsed, giddy with fright,
Some warriors rise, return to fight.

Struck by arrows, like clouds some roar,
Some flee seeing deadly arrows soar;
Headless bodies throb on the ground,
'Catch! Kill!' from rolling heads comes sound.

In moments few by Rama's arrows, thousands of demon die,
Speeding through air arrows come back to quiver by his side. 68

Within his mind Kumbhakarana thought,
How soon the demons' end Rama wrought;
The warrior great's wrath flaming soared,
Loudly and proudly then he roared.

In anger he huge mounts uproots,
'Midst crowded vanar warriors shoots;
'Fore massive rocks the vanars hit,
Rama's arrows shattered them to bits.

In battle's fury Rama stretched bow,
Hundreds of fiery arrows go,
Which Kumbhakarana's huge body pierced,
'Midst clouds like lightning forks appeared.

From body dark blood thickly flows,
Like red ochre from rainspouts pours;
Seeing his deep wounds vanars came near,
Kumbhakarana laughed—they shook with fear.

With mighty roar heard o'er the worlds, like elephant vanars maimed,
Millions of vanars threw on earth, hailing demon king's name. 69

Bears vanars run in disarray,
Like seeing a wolf, sheep flee away;
Uma! bears vanars sped in herds,
Begged Mercy in imploring words.

The vanars screamed: "O Benign Lord!
From woes Protector! O kind God!
This demon will destroy us all!
Protect us Lord! Protect us Lord!"

As thus the vanars distressed cried,
The Lord with bow and arrows hied,
Towards the mighty warrior brave,
Lives of his vanar friends to save.

One hundred arrows from Rama's bow,
Made blood from his huge body flow.
T'wards Rama long steps he forward took,
Earth rocked unsteady, mountains shook.

A hill top in his hand he bore,
Rama's arrow hand from body tore.
In other hand the peak he held,
That arm too did Rama's arrow rend.

Arms lost, Kumbhakarana wrathful roared,
Like without wings Mandrachal soared.
He stared at Rama in blazing heat,
As if three worlds he wished to eat.

Roaring with rage he attacked then, mouth open, lashing out his tongue,
Liberated ones and gods above, held breath and frightened their hands rung. 70

When Rama saw gods tremble in fear.
He stretched bowstring upto his ear;
In Kumbhakarana's mouth he arrows fed,
But still the warrior onward sped!

His mouth quiver of Death appeared,
He attacked yet with arrows pierced.
Then Rama a deadly arrow strung,
That swiftly head from body flung.

His severed head 'fore Ravana tossed;
King mourned like snake had *mani* lost.
Earth sank as body lurched sans head,
To cut in two, Rama arrow sped.

Like peaks both parts of body rushed,
On earth: bears vanars demons crushed.

To Rama's Abode his spirit flew,
Amazed the gods around him drew.

In joy the gods sweet music played,
Blossoms on demon's body laid.
Their prayers said, gods homewards fare,
At that moment Narada came there.

On battlefield Kaushal's Lord Rama stood glorious in His Peerless might,
Lotus eyes red, form marked with blood, on face small sweat drops glisten bright;
His hand upon his bow was placed, bears vanars thronged along his side,
Tulsi, e'en Shesha cannot narrate, beauty which in this form abides.
Said Shiva: 'O maiden of the mounts! Kumbhakarana was a demon vile,
Yet he earned Mercy of the Lord, who prays not to Him is unwise. 71

11. THE FOURTH BATTLE : MEGHNAD FIGHTS LAKSHMANA AGAIN

With the death of Kumbhakarana, the demons had lost most of their warriors, even as virtues are lost by boasting of one's attainments. Ravana was distressed at Kumbhakarana's death and there was great lamentation in his palace. The royal ladies and queens were disconsolate and wept as they recounted the valorous deeds of the mighty warrior.

Seeing his father in great distress, Meghnad consoled the demon king:

To grief filled Ravana, Meghnad spake:
"Lament not father, courage take!
Tomorrow see my strength to kill,
I talk not now of my great skill.

From deity, chariot strength I get,
Father! you have not seen them yet."
Thus Meghnad boasted through the night,
At dawn vanars came back to fight.

Mighty demons did chariots ride,
Vanars pressed forward with big strides.
'To victory!' both armies did yell,
The battle fierce no words can tell.

Leaping upon his chariot charmed, Meghnad looked as to sky he'd fly,
He thundered forth in fiery rage, the trembling vanars heaved a sigh. 72

Sharp daggers, missiles, swords and darts,
And deadly arms like lightning sparks;

Stones, axes hurled with all his might,
Shooting arrows he came to fight.

In all directions arrows aimed,
Like monsoon clouds in torrents rained.
Loud shouts of 'Seize! Kill!' rent the air,
But none could see him anywhere.

The vanars leapt with trees and peaks,
But seeing him not had to retreat.
By cunning skill, paths banks and caves,
His speeding arrows all encaged.

Thus Meghnad dazed the vanars brave,
As Indra had held the mountains slave.
Hanuman and Angad, Nal and Neel,
By his great might dismayed did fell.

Lakshmana, Vibhishana and Sugriva
Were hurt till bodies looked like sieves.
Then Rama his target he did make,
His arrows hissing like a snake.

As fiery arrows left Meghnad's bow, they turned into snakes! He aimed his arrows so swiftly and with such skill that very soon vast numbers of vanars lay on the ground by snakes emanating from his arrows.

Like the rest of the warriors, Rama also lay on the battlefield with snakes entwined around him. Thus the Lord, Beyond Reason and Knowledge allowed His earthly Form to be subjected to the same afflictions as his vanar friends. 73

Meanwhile, as Meghnad saw the vanars lying helpess on the battle-field, he alighted from his aerial chariot and assailed them with harsh words. Jambwan, who had escaped the fury of Meghnad's arrows, challenged him and rushed to grapple with him.

"O fool!" roared Meghnad, "I had spared you because of your old age and you dare to challenge me now!"

As Jambwan rushed further, Meghnad threw his dazzling trident at him. Jambwan caught the trident deftly in his hand and struck Meghnad viciously with it at his chest. Meghnad could not bear the deadly power of his own weapon and he fell to the ground.

Now Narada Muni was witnessing the battle and saw the entire vanar army rendered ineffective by Meghnad's skilful move. He requested Garuda, the king of Birds, to go to the rescue of the stricken vanar army. Garuda came as a flash of lightning and swallowed the snakes which held

the vanar warriors captive, the vanars rejoiced seeing their warriors saved and yearned again to engage with the demons.

Meanwhile as Meghnad recovered, he was astounded to find the vanars ready to attack again. He had imagined that the snakes would strangle the vanar warriors and victory would be assured. Meghnad was sorely distressed finding that even his most dreadful weapon had failed and he decided to make offerings to his deity and invoke blessings for invincibility. He thereupon went into a cave in the high mountains to perform his sacrifices.

Vibhishana knew what Meghnad planned to do. He hurried to Rama and told him that the demon warrior must be prevented from making the sacrificial offerings otherwise it would be very difficult to vanquish him. Rama asked Vibhishana, Jambwan and Sugriva to go with Lakshmana and bespoil the sacrificial altar. He told Lakshmana to engage in combat with the demon prince and bring about his end.

Rama's blessings Lakshmana humbly took,
With bow and arrows as he stood.
Drawing strength of Rama's power in his heart,
He spoke grave words in deep regard:

"If victory I bring not today,
Myself devotee I'll not say.
To save him e'en if Shankar came,
I'll kill the demon, on Rama's Name!"

Bowing to Rama's Feet Lakshmana then went with other vanar warriors brave,
Angad, Nal, Neel, Mayanda, Hanuman, where Meghnad deity's blessings craved. 75

Offering oxen's blood Meghnad sat,
Invoking deity in thought wrapt.
His offerings vanars threw away,
But from his prayers he did not sway.

To rouse him when the vanars failed,
They pulled his limbs, shouted and railed.
Chasing them then, he trident shook,
The vanars ran where Lakshmana stood.

Meghnad in anger stormed aloud,
Like black and thundering monsoon cloud.
Angad and Hanuman at him rushed,
But stopped as trident by them brushed.

At Lakshmana then he trident sent,
An arrow sharp in twain it rent.
Hanuman, Angad charged with a yell,
But brave Meghnad they could not fell.

Thus failing when they back returned,
Meghnad attacked in fury burned.
Like Death itself at Lakshmana came,
Who swiftly streams of arrows aimed.

Like hail when arrows round him fell.
Meghnad took flight for a brief spell;
Then came back swiftly with skilled guile,
Now seen like flash, unseen awhile.

He dazed the vanars by his game,
Lakshmana more wrathful then became.
'The battle no more brooks delay',
He thought as he resolved to slay.

In Rama's devotion mind aglow,
He strung an arrow to his bow.
It struck deeply in Meghnad's heart,
He called for Rama as soul did part.

"Where is Lakshmana brother of Rama; Where's Rama?" he falling sighed,
"Blest is thy mother!" Hanuman said, "With Rama's Name thou hast died!"
76

With ease Hanuman the demon raised,
At Lanka's gate his body placed.
When gods, gandharvas of his death heard.
They came on chariots in joy stirred.

They played their drums and blossoms rained,
Praising the Lord, His Name they hailed.
'Eternal Lord! Mercy Who shows,
Of gods Thou hast redeemed the woes!'
Singing hymns gods to heavens turned,
Lakshmana then to Lord Rama returned.

Of his son's death as Ravana heard,
He swooned and fell upon the earth.
Mandodari wailed in sorrow swept,
Beating her breasts loudly she wept.

Lanka's people in sorrow deep,
Blamed Ravana for his evil deed.

Then Ravana to solace his queens, spoke wisely to dispel their grief,
"All life on earth must end one day, our sojourn here is only brief." 77

Thus did Ravana, who was himself steeped in vice, seek to allay the grief of Mandodari and other queens. Many are those who can give good advice but few follow for themselves the advice that they give.

A mighty and gallant warrior had fallen to earth. The stillness of the night was broken by wailings in the royal palaces and the city of Lanka.

12. THE FIFTH BATTLE: RAVANA'S ENCOUNTER WITH LAKSHMANA

In the morning the vanars were again at the four forts of Lanka. The warriors of demon army were disheartened with the heavy losses inflicted upon them and at the death of their bravest leaders. Then Ravana himself came to the battlefield.

Next day as sun on Lanka dawned,
Its forts the gallant vanars stormed.
Calling his demons Ravana warned :
"Those who in battle fell alarmed,

Had better now abstain from strife,
Cowards retreat when come to fight!
On my own strength this war I seeked,
Foe's challenge I shall myself meet.

I'll lead today; come those who dare!"
Martial music then filled the air.
Brave warriors fared vanars to shoot,
In vast numbers like storms of soot.

All around occurred omens ill,
Which Ravana spurned in his proud will.
In his great pride he failed to size the many bad omens,
Neighing horses turned, arms fell on ground, from chariots fell demons.
Jackals called, vultures flew above, crows cawed and asses brayed.
Owls hooted in a mournful way, Death's gloom seemed to prevade.
But proud Ravana led to his end was steeped in lust's emotion,
Can peace, good omens, righteous ways, be known without devotion? 78

The demons marched in all their might,
In four divisions moved to fight.

On chariots, horses and on foot,
With flags and banners on poles stood.

Mighty war elephants moved in herds,
Like thundering clouds by strong winds stirred
Demons surged forth around their king,
Like profuse blossoms of the spring.

Elephants swayed as the armies flocked,
Waves rose in oceans, mountains rocked.
Dust rose thickly hiding the sun,
Earth shuddered, wind in the sky hung.

Dreadful sound of drums were heard,
Like clouds of doom loudly thundered.
Pipes and clarionets playing war tunes,
Filled in the warriors battle's fumes.

Brave demons their deeds recounted,
Roaring, thundering, horses mounted.
Ravana said: "O warriors rush!
Herds of bears and vanars crush!

The brother-princes I shall kill,"
Roaring thus, he led with skill.

Both armies hailed victory to their leaders and launched a fierce attack. Vibhishana was dismayed when he saw that the Lord was without a chariot. 79

Seeing Ravana's chariot, Rama on feet,
Vibhishana was with doubts besieged.
How could Rama warrior-king defeat?
Deeply distressed, he thus did speak:

"Without shoes, armour, chariot seat,
How can you demon king defeat?"
Rama smilled and said: "Listen my friend,
Victories on other things depend.

Bravery, steadfastness: Chariot's wheels,
Its flags and banners: Truth, good deeds;
Horses: might, wisdom, grace, restrain;
Mercy, poise, pardon are the reins.

The charioteer is prayer of God,
Detachment: shield; contentment: sword;

Charity: dagger; wisdom: strength.
Knowledge: the strong bow firmly bent.

The quiver: gentle and calm heart,
Arrows: control; belief: the dart.
Respect for sages armour is,
No victory more fruitful than this!

Such chariot of dharma one who owns,
Can never be by foe o'erthrown.
O friend, such chariot of wisdom, who seeks in life to lead,
Winning all battles on the earth, shall from rebirth be freed." 80a
Vibhishana filled with ecstasy, bowed to Rama's Lotus Feet,
"O Lord" he said, "Today you've taught all that one e'er can need!" 80b

While Rama was talking to Vibhishana, the two armies had come in their formations and stood facing each other. Angad and Hanuman raised full throated slogans for the victory of Rama. From the other side demons hailed victory for Ravana and invoked their deities to bestow upon them triumphant success in the encounter.

In the first charge vanars overwhelmed the demons. Even though blood flowed out from their wounds, vanars attacked demons fiercely till they had to retreat to their own side. Cries of "victory to Rama!" from the jubilant vanars rent the air.

Then Ravana took a bow in each of his ten hands and picked up deadly arrows in his other ten hands. He asked for his chariot to be driven towards the vanar army and placed in front of them. 81

He urged his demons to attack. "Charge! O heroes!" he exclaimed. "Crush the vanars!"

The battle then started fiercely:

Ravana himself attacked enraged,
Vanars the demon king engaged.
Hurling huge trees and blocks of rocks,
But he remained unmoved, unshocked.

As rocks against his armour hit,
With deafening noise they flew off split.
He proudly stood, in anger blazed,
With chariot held, in scorn he gazed.

Then at vanars bold Ravana rushed,
His chariot helpless warriors crushed,
The vanars flew back full of fright.
To seek from Ravana's wrath respite.

"Save us O Lord!" they cried and wept,
"Like Death Ravana has vanars swept,"
When Ravana saw the vanars run,
In all ten bows he arrows strung.

Like flying serpents his fiery arrows at the vanars Ravana sent,
Whither could vanars seek refuge? In all directions arrows went.
Pursued by arrows frightened vanars ran beseeching in their woe:
"O Mercy's Ocean! Save us Rama! Give us protection of Thy bow!"

Finding the vanars sorely afflicted, Lakshmana could not restrain his wrath and he strode boldly towards Ravana: 82

Said Lakshmana: "King! Why vanars slay!
Prepare to fight and go Death's way!"
"I sought you prince!" Ravana exclaimed,
"My son's death had my heart inflamed."

He sped sharp arrows as he spoke,
Each of them Lakshmana deftly broke.
He aimed weapons when arrows failed,
They fell by Lakshmana's arrows nailed.

From Lakshmana's bow then arrows flew,
His chariot broke, charioteer slew.
Five score arrows his foreheads plied,
In mountain holes like serpents glide.

His chest then hundred arrows ploughed,
Swooned to the earth the demons proud.
But soon arose the warrior famed,
And Brahma's missile at Lakshmana aimed.

The power bestowed on him by Brahma, struck Lakshmana deep within his breast,
The demon rushed as Lakshmana swooned, to capture him he tried his best.
Of Whose pleasure like speck of dust the earth entire its burden rests,
Such Lakshmana Ravana tried to lift, who holds the worlds at his behest.
Seeing this Hanuman the Son of Wind, rushed Lakshmana to assist,
As Hanuman came Ravana in wrath hit him with his strong fist.

Hanuman rested on his knees dazed,
Then slowly rose in anger blazed.
He struck Ravana with all his might,
Like lightning does a hill top blight.

The powerful blow the warrior dazed,
At Hanuman's might he stood amazed.
"My strength be cursed!" great Hanuman said,
"Demon! I failed to strike you dead!"

Lifting Lakshmana to Rama he went,
Ravana admired again his strength.
Seeing Lakshmana, Rama said: "Rise my dear,
To shelter gods you had come here."

With Rama's blessings he opened eyes,
Brahma's power went soaring to the skies.
With bow and arrows in great might,
Lakshmana returned to Ravana fight!

He broke his chariot, killed charioteer, forcing him to stand on ground,
Hundreds of arrows struck his chest, wounded gravely Ravana fell down.
Another chariot picked him up, and back to Lanka quickly sped,
Seeing him retreat Lakshmana returned and to the Lord he bowed his head.

The two armies withdrew to their camps. When Ravana recovered, he was dismayed to find that he had been carried away from the battlefield.

Ravana then started performing sacrifices to invoke gods to grant him victory over Rama. The news was conveyed to Vibhishana who immediately counselled Rama to have the sacrificial offerings defiled.

Hectic activity took place to formulate plans until late in the night.

13. THE SIXTH BATTLE: RAVANA FIGHTS RAMA

Early next morning some warriors of the vanar army left for Lanka. They entered the city quietly and swiftly went into Ravana's palace. Finding Ravana performing sacrifices, they shouted at him: "O shameless one! Fleeing from the battlefield you are now seeking shelter of gods like a spurious saint!"

Angad attacked Ravana viciously but Ravana was so deeply absorbed in meditation that he did not even look at his assailant. Then all vanars attacked him together and at last Ravana was aroused.

Seeing vanars all around him he got up. He attacked the vanars in great rage, but having fulfilled their mission, the vanars retreated hastily to report their success to Rama.

Foiled in completing his sacrificial prayers, Ravana returned to the battlefield in fury. His army of formidable demons surged behind him. Gods in heavens shuddered at the sight of his great army comprising numerous elephants, horses and chariots.

'Midst omens ill he went to fight,
Vultures upon his heads alight;
By Death impelled he did not care,
'Let drums resound!' proudly declared.

The mighty demon army stood,
On chariots, elephants, horses, foot;
T'wards Rama the demon warriors came,
Like insects rush towards a flame.

The gods from heavens Rama addressed:
'Long has Ravana the gods oppressed,
More softness to him do not show,
Relieve now Janaka's daughter's woe'.

Hearing the gods Rama smiled and rose,
Held bow in hand, arranged arrows,
On head hair firmly knotted lain,
'Midst them blossoms glory proclaim.

Red eyes, like clouds sky-blue his form,
To bring delight, worlds to adorn.
To waist his dazzling quiver tied,
In hand famed Saranga bow abides.

Holding the Saranga bow in hand, quiver with arrows by his side,
His shoulders broad and on his chest the mark of Bhrigu doth abide.
Says Tulsi, as the Lord held bow and from his quiver arrows took,
The Universe, Diggaj, Tortoise, Shesha, the earth its mountains trembling stood.
Seeing Glory of the Lord, the gods from heavens blossoms rain,
'Hail! Hail! the Lord of might! Abode of Qualities, Mercy, hail!' 86

The demon army onward rushed,
So vast that warriors' shoulders brushed.
Seeing them the vanar warriors hie,
Like billowing clouds of Doom in sky.

Swords, daggers of bright dazzling sheen,
Like ten directions lightning seen;
Horses, chariots and elephant's sound
As if loud thundering clouds surround.

Vanars in zeal tails upraised wield,
Like rainbow formed o'er battlefield.
Dust rises like dense misty haze,
Before deluge of arrows' sprays.

From ranks of both armies rocks fly,
Like thunder bolts flung from the sky,
From quiver Rama sharp arrows aimed,
Wounding skilled demon warriors famed.

As arrows strike the warriors yell,
Fall to the ground in dizzy spells.
Like waterfalls blood flowed from forms,
Faint hearts were chilled seeing blood stream formed.

River of blood on battlefield filled faint hearted with chilling fear,
Both armies facing each other of this river its banks appear;
Life contained in this fearful stream are wounded horses, warriors brave,
Arrows, missiles, deadly serpents; shields: are its tortoise; bows: its waves.
Warriors fall like trees on banks, bone-marrow foam on top,
Hearts of warriors soar with zeal, spirits of cowards drop. 87

Vetals, goblins, witches and ghosts,
Bathe in this river with Shiva's hosts;
Crows, kites swoop floating limbs to catch,
To eat, from each other they snatch.

Some say: 'So plentiful your fare,
Yet wretched is nature you bear'.
Along banks wounded warriors sigh,
Their dangling limbs in river lie.

Vultures from dead pull intestines,
Like fisherman pulls fishing-line;
Birds prey on corpses as they float,
As if sporting upon a boat.

Witches fill flowing blood in skulls,
In sky ghosts' women dance and swirl,
Chandmundis with skulls marking time,
Sing drunken tunes in haunting lines.

Jackals crush bones and corpses eat,
Growling at each who comes to feast;
Millions of bodies roll sans heads,
Heads lying on ground still 'Hail! Hail!' said.

Heads say 'Hail! Hail!' bodies sans heads in stumbled heaps still seem to run,
Birds fight o'er skulls rolling about, warriors of might push weaker ones;
Vanars getting their strength from Rama, crush demons where in groups

they keep,
Demons slain by Rama's arrows sharp lie on the battlefield asleep.
Ravana reflects within his mind, the demons' end draws near,
'Gainst millions vanars I'm alone, I'll make Maya appear. 88

The battle raged till late in the afternoon. Warriors of both armies were wrought with fatigue, but undeterred they fought grimly. Seeing Rama moving in ankle-deep blood amidst dying warriors. Indra sent his chariot for him. When Rama saw his warriors aweary, he turned towards them:

Rama then addressed his vanars bod and spoke these words loving and grave:

"See now my duel with Ravana, you have fought well my warriors brave!"

Rama bowed to sages as he went,
Mounting the chariot Indra had sent.
Seeing him Ravana hastened in rage,
Challenging Rama to battle wage.

He said: "Renunciant hear my name!
I'm not like warriors you have slain.
I'm Ravana great, of fame well known.
Lokpals I have in prison thrown,

Khara, Dushana, Viradh you did slay,
Bali killed while you concealed lay.
Brave warrior demons you have stilled,
Kumbhakarana, Meghnad also killed.

Today I shall avenge their loss,
If arms with me you dare to cross.
Your match at last prince you have met,
I shall today hand you to Death!"

Ravana to his own death was led,
The knowing Lord then smiled and said:
Tales of your greatness may be true,
But boasting stop and valour shew.

By boasting destroy not your fame, I give you good advice,
Like rose, mango and jack fruit trees, men are of three main types.
Like some trees flowers, some flower and fruit, and some fruit only grow,
So some men talk, some talk and act, some act their minds to show,
Hearing Rama Ravana laughed aloud, and said: "You teach me learning,
You feared not when you sought to fight, now for life you are fearing!"

In haughty pride he held his bows,
Like streaks of lightning arrows rose,
Sharp deadly arrows from him sped,
In sky, on earth, all over spread.

Then arrows came with fire's flash,
Rama swiftly turned them into ash.
A missile then he aimed abashed,
That Rama again with arrows slashed.

Ravana then discs and trident sent,
By Rama's sharp arrows they lay bent.
Thus Ravana's weapons all were stilled,
Like vile desires are not fulfilled.

Five score arrows then Ravana aimed,
Rama's charioteer fell taking His Name.
Rama raised him quickly from the ground,
At Ravana's fury then he frowned.

As Rama grasped bow, arrows from quiver in excitement seemed to rear.
The vibrant sound of his bowstring filled demon warriors with great fear.
Mandodari trembled; oceans, earth and mountains shaking did appear,
Gods smiled to see elephants run thinking that their end was now near.
Stretching the bowstring to his ear, Rama deadly arrows sent,
A stream of fiery arrows flew, each like a winged serpent. 91

Like serpents Rama's swift arrows went,
Bringing charioteer, horses end.
His chariot, banners, flags all gone,
He roared to fight but stood forlorn.

A chariot new he took ashamed,
Deadly missiles and weapons aimed.
All his manoeuvres were suppressed,
Like vile designs to men oppress.

Ten tridents sharp then Ravana sped,
Four horses of Rama's chariot bled;
Rama raised them and in fury rose,
From stretched bow-string whizzed sharp arrows.

To lotus woods of Ravana's heads,
Rama's arrows were like black bees led;
Hitting each head ten darts sped out,
Blood poured from heads like from rainspouts.

Ravana rushed on, drenched in blood's flow,
Rama swiftly arrows strung to bow;
Thirty arrows like flashes sped,
Clipped twenty arms and all ten heads.

The old ones rolled and others grew,
These too Rama felled but sprouted new;
Betimes thus Lord arms heads effaced,
As old ones fell, new took their place.

The Lord betimes struck heads and arms,
Because sportive are Deeds of Rama.
Rolling heads, flying arms filled the sky,
Like thousands Rahu Ketu fly.

Like Rahus Ketus spinning round, dripping with blood all o'er the sky,
Held by swift arrows from Rama's bow, they cannot fall, for ever fly;
Each arrow pierced many flying heads, the sight in sky such wonder brings,
As if the Sun inflamed in wrath, in hot rays many Rahus strings.
Betimes Lord cuts heads undeterred, betimes they multiply,
Like for those steeped in sense pleasures, passions intensify. 92

Around him seeing flood of his heads,
Ravana grows wrathful, death forgets.
With deafening roar, inflamed with pride,
Ten bowstrings stretched, he boldly strides.

On battlefield in anger spent,
From bow a shower of arrows sent,
Which made chariot of Rama unseen,
Like dense fog doth the bright Sun screen

The gods in anguish sighed and shook,
In battle's wrath his bow Rama took,
Parting foe's arrows, heads he chopped,
Heaped on the earth all round they dropped.

While clipped heads darted in the skies,
'Victory! Victory!' each frenzied cries,
'Where is Lakshmana! where Sugriva hides!
Where doth Kaushal's Lord Rama abide!'

'Where is Rama!' hovering heads exclaim, seeing them vanars with fear were filled,
Rama smiled and held his dazzling bow, his arrows soon darting heads

stilled;
Kali's maids came, skulls garlands made and bathed in flowing blood's
hot spray,
As if to battle's fury's course, like banyan tree they come to pray.
In mighty rage then Ravana did a fiery missile aim,
Which sped towards Vibhishana as if Death Itself came. 93

As Rama beheld its flash he thought:
'My trothed word will be set at nought.'
Before Vibhishana Rama then stood,
Its dreadful aim on his breast took.

Struck by the weapon as Rama swooned,
The gods above thought they were doomed.
By missile hit seeing Rama grow weak,
Vibhishana did at Ravana leap.

"O fool!" he said in anger wrought,
"'Gainst gods and humans you have fought.
To Shiva you offered your own head,
For which you get new ones instead.

'Tis thus to live you get the chance,
But on your head Death does now dance.
Peace seek you, being of Rama a foe?"
Saying this Vibhishana club did throw.

Upon his chest as club did strike. Ravana fell faint upon the ground.
Blood flowed from each of his ten mouths, he rose as strength again he
found.
The warriors clashed in battle grim challenging each other to fight,
Vibhishana scorned at Ravana's strength, from Rama's blessings he
gathered might.

Meanwhile Hanuman saw that Vibhishana was weary of fighting Ravana. He hastened towards the demon king with a mountain peak in his hand. Flinging it at the mighty warrior, he broke his chariot. Ravana stood proudly having braved the attack, even though his body trembled and in spite of his weariness, he boldly challenged Hanuman, and the mighty warriors grappled with each other, leaping into the skies.

While they fought, Ravana used his skill of warfare to create an illusion to confound the vanars:

Ravana then vanished by his skill,
But in a trice swooped back to kill.

In Rama's army each vanar, bear,
Saw Ravana speeding everywhere.

Many Ravanas they seemed to see,
In all directions then did flee.
Sorely distressed and filled with fright,
"O Rama! Save us!" they screamed with might.

He seemed to come from all around,
Thundering loud with dreadful sound.
The gods exclaimed: 'Quick! let us go,
No hope of victory 'gainst this foe.

When one Ravana did gods defeat,
How can we now so many meet?'
Only Shiva, Brahma could there dare wait,
And in Rama's might those who had faith.

Those who had faith in the Lord kept their courage. Seeing gods and vanars sorely afflicted, Rama strung a powerful arrow to his bow and forced Ravana to give up his manoeuvres creating the illusion.

The proud demon king saw the gods heave a sigh of relief. Driven to fury by their delight, he rushed towards them. Even the gods were terrified by his sudden attack and took cover.

The gods then ran screaming in fright,
He roared: 'You cannot quit my sight!'
Angad saw gods in distress deep,
Flung him on ground, grasping his feet.

As he stumbled, Angad kicked him and to Lord Rama he quickly hied,
Ravana arose and roared aloud, his wrath made all tremble with fright,
He proudly held ten bows in hands and sped arrows as thick as rain,
Wounded vanars sighed all around, Ravana was thrilled in his pride vain.
Then Rama cut off his heads and arms along with quiver, bow,
They larger grew like evil done in shrines more sinful grow. 97

Seeing heads and arms grown again,
Bears vanars more wrathful became;
'E'en losing heads he does not die!'
In anger towards him they fly.

Angad, Sugriva, Hanuman, Nala, Neel,
All famed for valour, might and zeal,
With trees and massive rocks attacked,
He caught them—at vanars threw back!

Some warriors pierce with nails and run,
Some kick with all their might and come;
Nala-Neel leapt nimbly on his heads,
And tore the flesh of his foreheads.

In pain from heads he saw blood drip,
He raised his arms to vanars grip,
They pranced on heads, now here then there,
Like two bees in lotus woods fare.

He caught them both then in a flash,
They twisted free e'er he could dash.
In wrath he snatched his bow again,
By arrows they were wounded lain.

Hanuman and vanars fainted lie,
To Ravana's joy night was now nigh,
'Vanars had swooned' when Jambwan heard,
The warrior great rushed wrath bestirred

The mighty bears with trees and rocks.
Daring Ravana they thither flocked;
Ravana's wrath grew with challenge new,
Catching the bears to ground he threw.

Seeing his troops were faced with defeat,
Jambwan struck Ravana's chest with feet.

By mighty blow upon his chest, Ravana fell dizzy to the ground,
In all his twenty hands he held bears like midst lotus bees were bound;
Seeing him lying fainted on the ground, Jambwan kicked him, to Rama returned,
Charioteer placed Ravana on seat, in darkness towards Lanka turned.
Vanars rose when they woke from swoon, hailing Rama stood around,
In Lanka demons shook with fear, went Ravana to surround. 98

14. SITA'S ANGUISH

While the grim and fierce battle was being waged outside the gates of Lanka, Sita sat under the Ashoka tree in deep anguish thinking of the outcome of the war.

The night after the battle between Rama and Ravana, Trijata the demoness, came to Sita and acquainted her with the happenings of the day and how Ravana, though hard pressed by Rama, could not be vanquished:

Trijata seeing Sita anguish wrought,
Told her how Rama had Ravana fought.
Hearing of his heads reappear,
Her gentle heart was full of fear.

Sita was sad, she was distressed,
Beseeching her she thus addressed.
"O mother! weary is my heart,
Will Ravana's life from him e'er part?

E'en losing heads he is not killed,
God seems to have my sorrow willed.
'Tis my misfortune life he keeps,
Parting me too from my lord's feet.

That God Who made that Maya's deer,
Is still annoyed with me I fear.
The God Who makes me now so sad,
To chide Lakshmana had made me mad.

The God Who now my heart does maim,
With arrows dipped in parting's flame;
Who makes me live although I pine,
Gives life to him for sins of mine."

For Rama thus yearning Sita sighed,
She trembled as she wept and cried.
Consoling her Trijata then said:
"His heart when hit will be dead.

Rama seeks not yet to hit that mark,
Your image Ravana holds in heart.

He holds your image in his heart and Rama abides within your heart.
The world existing in Rama's heart would thus be lost with Ravana's heart."

Trijata saw Sita brood again pleased by her words as well as pained,
"Beauty! be not by doubts besieged, he will soon die", she explained.
"Oftimes will Rama cut off his heads the demon king will lose his wits,
All knowing Rama then will arrow aim, to shatter his vile heart to bits."99

To solace Sita thus she spoke,
With faith in Rama giving her hope.
When she went, Sita on Rama mused,
With lonely love she was suffused.

She could not bear the night and moon,
Long weary hours ending not soon.
Away from Rama, sorrow did creep,
She pined in grief and anguish deep.

As in her heart she wished to die,
Flickered her left arm and her eye!
In her brave heart she understood,
'I'll meet my Rama's say omens good.'

15. THE SEVENTH AND LAST BATTLE : THE END OF RAVANA

Ravana had been carried back to his palace in Lanka in an unconscious state at the end of the previous day's battle. He lay in his bedchamber with the queen weeping silently by his side. The charioteer stood with his head hung low in distress at the serious condition of his king.

At midnight Ravana recovered:

When Ravana consciousness regained,
Chiding charioteer he exclaimed:
"From battle why did you retreat?
O fool! I have lost my prestige!"

On told how battle's course had passed,
Ere dawn Ravana for chariort asked.
Seeing him with demons come to fight,
Vanars attacked with all their might.

They pulled out trees and held large rocks,
Grinding their teeth for fight they flocked.

Holding aloft large rocks in hands, vanars and bears rushed to attack,
They threw them at the fierce demons, till hurt and beaten they turned back.
When demons fled in disarray, vanars rushed Ravana to surround,
The demon king took by surprise, clawing, hitting, yelling all around.
Finding vast numbers of vanars, attacking him from every side,
The cunning Ravana slipped away, and came back in a skilled disguise,
100

He created an illusion of skulls all around him with ghosts and witches drinking human blood and dancing wildly before him. The frightened vanars ran amok clamouring for shelter.

Then Rama, resplendent in all his majesty and glittering like a peerless warrior amongst warriors, strode into the battlefield. He heralded his

arrival with a single arrow from his bow forcing Ravana to withdraw his illusion that tortured the vanars.

To sing of battle's fury grim, in words inept Tulsi doth try,
Like even fly with its own strength flutters its wings to reach the sky 101a
Betimes the Lord strikes heads and arms, the king of Lanka does not die,
The Lord displays His Sportive Deeds, but gods and sages anguished lie. 101b

A mighty battle ensued. A strong breeze below across the battlefield. The earth trembled within and clouds turned reflecting the colour of blood flowing on the battlefield. The gods shuddered and were filled with remorseful forebodings.

As bears and vanars fled distressed,
Vibhishana thus the Lord, addressed:
"Ravana charmed life in navel bears,
In scornful pride he boldly fares."

Rama smiled hearing words of his friend,
Sharp arrows chose for Ravana's end.
Bad omens made warriors afraid,
As jackals wailed and asses brayed.

The hooting owls Death's warning gave,
Bright shooting stars the sky did pave.
The burning heat parched mouths and lips,
The sun unscheduled did eclipse.

Mandodari's heart trembled with fear.
E'en eyes of images shed a tear.

Wind blew in gales and lightning flashed, blood red the clouds appeared in sky,
Thickly lay dust and dirt on earth, ill omens made e'en images cry.
All life on earth trembled with fear, in deep distress their hands gods rung,
Knowing gods to be in turmoil lost, Merciful Rama his arrows strung.
Pulling bowstring upto his ears, thirty one arrows Rama then aimed,
Like flying deadly cobras black, to Ravana's huge body they sailed. 102

The first arrow his navel bled,
One each in arm and in each head.
His heads and arms with arrows went,
Ravana's huge body slowly bent.

Earth rocked as body forward drew,
Rama's arrow sharp cut it in two.

The dying warrior roared aloud:
'Where's Rama! His end I'll bring about!'

Earth shivered as his body dropped,
Waves rose in rivers, mountains rocked.
In twain his mighty body rushed,
In falling bears and vanars erushed.

His heads fell to Mandodari turned,
To Rama's quiver arrows returned.
The gods above rejoiced to see,
Lord Rama's tumultous victory.

To Rama's abode Ravana's soul hied,
Shiva-Brahma were pleased the way he died.
Greetings of victory filled the air,
"Hail to Sri Rama Who might does bear!"

"O Merciful One!" sung the gods, "O granter of Salvation! O Redeemer of woes of pleasure pain, life, death and other opposites! O Lord Who grants peace to those who seek Thy shelter! O Slayer of vice! O Eternal Bestower of kindness! O All-knowing Lord! Hail to Thee!"

The gods showered flowers and played celestial music of victory on their drums.

As Rama stood on the battlefield, he appeared more brilliant than many Kamadevas. Rama gently swayed his bow in his hand. Drops of blood glistened on his body like red sparrows sitting contentedly amidst the boughs of an evergreen tree.

Touching scenes of grief were witnessed in Ravana's palace:

As Ravana's heads towards her rolled,
Mandodari swooned, she wilted cold.
To solace her royal ladies hied,
Gently took her to Ravana's side.

She wept seeing limbs from body torn,
Her hair lay strewn, her limbs forlorn.
Striking her breasts she cried and wept.
Recalling lord's might as he slept.

"O lord! earth trembled at thy might,
Sun, moon, fire paled before thy sight.
To bear they weight Shesha could not rise,
Now midst the dust thy body lies!

Varuna, Kuvera, Indra, god of air,
Face thee in battle none could dare.

Thou vanquished Yama by strong arms thine,
Thou sleeps unmourned now, darling mine!

The whole world knew thy glorious fame,
Sons, family's might, words could not name.
O husband! Rama's path thou did cross,
None is now left to mourn thy loss!

O love! o'er God's world thou held sway,
Lokpals bowed heads to respect pay.
Alas! beasts eat thy limbs today,
To Rama, my lord, thou did not pray!

O darling mine, thou heard me not,
Led to thy death, Rama human thought!

Thou took as human being the Lord who is fire for the demons' wood,
Thou worshipped not Merciful Lord 'For Whom Brahma, Shiva in respect stood.
Thy frame my love from very birth on strife bent strode along sin's road,
I bow before the Gracious Lord Who gave thee yet His Own Abode.
Departed love! the like of Rama, Mercy's Ocean none is,
Who grants to thee the state that e'en to saints he seldom gives." 104

Hearing her words, learned and meek,
Sages and gods were filled with peace.

Brahma, Shiva, Narada and munis wise,
Who knew in Rama Divine Bliss lies.
Enraptured on His Glory gazed,
Peaceful in hearts, devotion blazed.

As Ravana's queen her loss bewailed,
Vibhishana was with grief assailed.
Sadly he gazed at Ravana's face,
Rama sent Lakshmana to grief assuage.

Gently his heart did Lakshmana calm,
Brought him to seek comfort from Rama.
Softly said Rama: "Now abjure grief,
Perform the rites for his soul's peace."

At Rama's bidding he did last rites,
Bearing in mind Lanka's sad plight.

Mandodari too oblations gave, in grief she then did part,
She sadly went to palace hers, Rama's Glory in her heart. 105

Such was the end of the proud and arrogant ten headed demon king. It was the triumph of Divine righteousness over wicked ways of arrogant and vile persecutors of those devoted to the Name of the Lord. The purpose of the Divine Incarnation had been fulfilled.

16. VIBHISHANA CROWNED KING OF LANKA

Even before Rama thought of sending for Sita, he sought to fulfil the rites of crowning Vibhishana as King of Lanka. He therefore called Lakshmana and asked him to take Sugriva, the vanar king, Angad, Jambwan, Nal, and Neel and Hanuman and proceed to Lanka to install Vibhishana as king:

Vibhishana bowed before the Lord,
Rama, Mercy's Ocean, Lakshmana called.
"Go with Sugriva, Angad, Jambwan,
Along with Nal, Neel and Hanuman.

You are all blessed with wisdom's glow,
On Vibhishana Lanka's crown bestow.
I cannot into cities fare,
Lakshmana will for me presence bear."

Hearing Rama's words the vanars went,
To celebrate the great event.
Vibhishana to the throne they bore,
They greeted him as crown he wore.

With folded hands they hailed his name,
Then all to take Rama's blessings came.

Thereafter Rama summoned the vanars who had assisted him in fighting the demons:

His blessings Rama on them bestowed,
Hearing his words their bodies glowed.

"By your great strength Ravana was killed", thus Rama to vanar heroes spoke,
"You made Vibhishana Lanka's king, respect your name shall e'er evoke.
All those devoted in My Name, shall of your deeds for ever sing,
No other effort they shall need, their love eternal peace shall bring."
Rama's Benign words as vanars heard, with deep devotion they were wrought,
They bowed before the Gracious Lord, to clasp His Holy Feet they sought.
106

Thus did the Lord fulfil the word he had spoken to Vibhishana for his devotion; and he rendered his thanks to the vanars who had rallied under him to vanquish the demons and reclaim his lost love.

17. SITA RETURNS TO RAMA

Rama then called Hanuman and asked him to go to Lanka and acquaint Sita with the good tidings of termination of hostilities and to bring news of her welfare:

As Hanuman entered Lanka's gate,
To greet him demons came in haste.
They welcomed him with great respect,
Took him where Sita vigil kept.

While yet afar, Hanuman bowed low
Sita then asked, her face aglow:
"How is my lord, whose form I crave,
Brother Lakshmana and vanars brave?"

Hanuman said: "Mother! Rama fares well,
The war ended when Ravana fell,
Vibhishana is now Lanka's king,
These tidings good to you I bring."

She wept with joy, her body bloomed, she said with bounteous peace infused:
"What can I give you, nothing can in the three worlds equal this news."
"Mother!" said he, "without a doubt, I've got the world's riches today.
I see the Lord and brave Lakshmana, over the enemy we hold sway."
Sita said: "Son! May qualities good, for ever in your heart abide,
The Lord together with Lakshmana may always in your heart reside. 107

O son, now pray such council hold,
So that I may my lord behold."
Then back to Rama son of Wind went,
And gave the message she had sent.

Hearing the news that Hanuman brought,
The Lord Vibhishana, Angad sought.
He said: "With Hanuman both of you,
Bring Sita here with honour due."

They hied considering blessed their lives,
Sita sat served by demons' wives.
With joy Vibhishana did declare:
"Sita to meet her lord prepare!"

Adorned with jewels like a queen,
They brought her on a palanquin,
Sweet rapture filled within her heart,
To meet her lord Sita did start.

With canes armed, demons guarded her,
With zealous steps they moved thither.
To see her bears and vanars came,
Demons halted them with their canes.

Rama smiled and said: "Hearken to me,
Let Sita walk so all can see.
Let vanars their mother behold!"
Sita stepped forth dazzling like gold,

Vanars were pleased at Rama's kind words,
Gods from above blossoms showered!

18. THE ORDEAL BY FIRE

While Rama was spending his days of banishment at Panchavati with Sita and Lakshmana he had consigned the sacred form of Sita to the flames to reside in them till he played the role of a human being steeped in Maya for the benefit of mankind. He had now accomplished the mission of his incarnation and wished to restore Sita to her Divine Form to be by His side.

Moreover, he wished to set at rest any doubts which may arise in the minds of demons or other ignorant men about Sita's purity while she had dwelt in captivity amongst the demons.

When Sita came to him therefore, the Gracious All Knowing and Merciful Lord spoke to her in the way of the world, desiring her to prove to him her purity.

Sita's true form was placed in flame,
Which Rama now wanted to reclaim.

For this reason, in a human way, some painful words Rama said,
Hearing which, knowing not their cause, demons shuddered with dread. 108

Said Sita, hearing words unkind,
Pure in speech, action and in mind.
"Lakshmana help me in dharma's name,
Prepare for me a burning flame!"

Hearing Sita thus uphold dharma,
Righteous, detached and calmly firm;
Lakshmana could not hold back a tear,
Beseeching Rama in silent fear.

But Rama unmoved and resolved stood,
Lakshmana then lit a fire with wood.
Sita seeing rising flames appear,
Spoke calmly, firmly, without fear.

"If in action, speech and thought,
My heart has only Rama sought.
Then fire god as you know my mind,
Make flames like sandal cool and kind."

With her Lord's image in her heart, Sita entered the flame,
She hailed the Lord! Lo! cool as sandal, burning fire became!
Her form of Maya she then shed amidst the flames that blazed.
Lord's Will none knew, gods and sages, stood wondering and amazed!
Holding Rama's hand Sita emerged, Mother of dazzling fame,
Like Ocean gave Lakshmi to Vishnu, from fire Rama Sita claimed.
She stood shyly at Rama's left side, full of Beauty's sweet glow,
Like golden bud 'gainst lotus blue, its dazzling form doth show!

The Lord and the Divine Mother stood side by side in dazzling beauty. Peace emanated from their resplendent forms. Multitudes of demons, vanars, sages and gods assembled on the sacred occasion bowed silently within their hearts to the Divine Incarnation Who had redeemed the world from dread of vice.

19. HYMNS OF VICTORY

As Rama and Sita stood side by side, the gods assembled to thank the Merciful Lord for giving them protection against persecution by the demons. Hailing the Name of the Lord and filled with rapturous ecstasy they said:

"O Gracious Rama! Friend of forlorn,
For sake of gods Thou hast been born.
This lust filled evil foe of world,
To death for his sins Thou hast hurled.

Calm, detached, steadfast, without form,
Sinless, unvanquished, strong, unborn.
Merciful, just, of qualities free,
O Brahman Eternal! Hail to Thee!

Fish, Tortoise, Man-lion and of Boar,
Parashurama, Dwarf, all Forms Thou bore.
O Lord when gods with grief were wrought,
Thou took a Form, our welfare sought.

This foe of gods, with evil plied,
His heart was full of lust and pride.
Of Thy Abode he won the prize,
His good fate does our minds surprise.

As gods we had Thy foremost claim,
But in devotion have not lain.
In birth death cycles we abide,
Protect us Lord!" the gods thus sighed.

After addressing their hymn to the Lord, the gods bowed before Rama and stood by respectfully with folded hands.

Then Brahma stood before Rama. His body glowed with devotion and his heart was pervaded with rapturous ecstasy. Addressing the Lord, he prayed: 110

Hail to Thee Hari! welfare's glow,
O Raghu great, Who holds the bow.
Tiger for life's cycles to blight,
Ocean of qualities, Knowledge bright!

Like Kama's Thy limbs but non-pariel,
Sages and poets Thy Glory hail,
Like Garuda, Ravana's evil's snake,
O Pure One, Thou didst helpless make.

Thou rids devotees grief and fear,
Wisdom's Abode, from anger clear.
Thy Form Incarnate dazzles bright,
Bearing earth's burdens, Learning's light!

Though Born, Eternal and Unborn!
Pervading, Endless, of One Form;
Thou made a king Vibhishana meek,
Slayer of Dushana, Thee I greet!

Abode of qualities, without pride,
Beyond Maya, in all abide.
Vast is the might of Thy strong arm!
Slayer of vice! I greet Thee Rama!

No cause or action does Thee bind,
Thou sins redeems of human mind,
Of Thine Own Will Thou Mercy grants.
Sita's and Thy great Name I chant.

O wielder of Thy graceful bow,
Thy eyes red like the lotus glow.
King amongst kings! Temple of peace,
By Thy grace, ego, passions cease.

Faultless, Sinless, sense pleasure free.
In all, yet Formless Vedas decree.
No fancy this: like sunlight, sun,
So from Thy world, apart yet one.

Thy Name the grateful vanars praise,
As on Thy radiant face they gaze.
Poor is indeed our god like state.
In sense pleasures our lives we waste.

Merciful One! to me now give,
Discerning wisdom while I live.
Redeem folly of actions vain,
Taking as pleasure what is pain.

World Thou adorns and vice doth slay,
Their hearts Shiva, Uma in Thee lay.
O King of kings, grant me the boon.
In Lotus Feet, my love may bloom.

Thus Brahma prayed to the Glory of the Lord. He could not bear to take his eyes away from the resplendent form of Rama. 111

Then the soul of the departed king of Ayodhya, Dashratha descended from the heavens. His eyes brimmed with tears as he beheld Rama. The two brothers bowed and received their father's blessings.

"O father!" said Rama, "it is by your blessings that I succeeded in vanquishing the invincible demon king."

Hearing his beloved son, Dashratha was overcome with joy, and tears flowed from his eyes. Rama then unfolded knowledge of His Infinite Form to King Dashratha. While he lived, the king was engrossed in attached devotion and had not attained eternal salvation. With his heart fixed in deep adoration. King Dashratha beheld the wondrous Form of Divine Rama and returned to heavens.

Then Indra, the king of gods, addressed the Lord:

Hail to Thee Rama! Abode of Grace!
Shelter for those faith in Thee place.
Wielder of arrows, stately bow,
Mighty Thy arms, with strength aglow!

Hail to Thee, Who Khara, Dushana slew,
Against Thy might, the demons flew,
Thou hast the wicked Ravana killed,
Hope in the breasts of gods instilled.

Hail to Thee, Who the world redeems,
Thy grandeur, Mercy, reign supreme.
Hail to Thee, Ravana's mighty foe,
Thou didst this demon's pride lay low.

Lanka's king of his might was vain,
O'er gods, gandharvas sway he had lain.
He harassed humans, beast and sage,
Ruthless was fury of his rage.

Of evil heart, engaged in strife,
He paid for sins losing his life.
O Lord Who grants Mercy to meek,
O Lotus Eyed, to my prayer heed.

With pride of greatness I was wrought,
None mightier; than me, so I thought.
But gazing at Thy lotus Feet,
From my vain pride I am now freed.

Some meditate on Brahma Unborn,
Whom Vedas declare is without Form.
But O my Lord, my Rama, Thou art
Dearest than all to my own heart.

O Rama, devotee me Thine treat,
Grant me love of Thy Holy Feet.
With Lakshmana Sita by Thy side,
Within my heart O Rama abide.

O Rama, Redeemer of all woes, grant me devotion of Thy Feet,
Thy Form lovelier than many Kamas, Abode of Peace, Thy Feet I greet.
Shiva, Brahma worship Thee, gods delight, by Thee all doubts on earth are freed.
O Rama! Thou God as human born, O mighty One, Thy Name I greet!

"O Lord!" exclaimed Indra, "be pleased upon me and let me know with pleasure how I may serve you." 113

Hearing Indra's gentle words, Rama spoke out of compassion: "O king of gods! demons have slain brave vanars who have lain their lives for my cause. O great king! grant them their lives!"

Thus did the Gracious Rama, Himself the Creator and Destroyer of the three worlds, grant greatness to the king of gods.

Indra raised the vanars by showering elixir upon the fallen heroes.

Gods rained flowers and mounting their chariots they then left for their abodes. Thereafter mighty Shiva himself, came to the gracious Lord to felicitate him on his victory: 114

O Raghu's Lord! Wielder of bow!
Protect me Lord, with Thy arrow.
Mighty wind to attachments blow,
Flame doubts to burn: gods hearts to glow.

Nirguna and Saguna! Beauteous One!
For darkness of delusion: sun;
Vanquisher of lust, wrath and pride,
In my devoted heart reside!

To wilt sense-pleasures' lotus: hail,
To grasp Thy Bounty, reasons fail.
Mandrachal for ocean of life,
Guide me, O Lord, through woes and strife.

O sky-blue Rama, of Lotus Eyes,
Who on Thee calls, to him Thou flies.
With Lakshmana, Sita by Thy side,
In my heart Rama for e'er reside.

"Lord", said Shiva as he departed, "when Thou art coronated as King of Ayodhya, I shall come to behold Thy wondrous deeds!" 115

Thus the gods, Brahma, Indra the king of gods, and Shiva sung to the glory of Rama's resplendent Glory and victory, and departed from Lanka.

20. RAMA LEAVES LANKA

After the gods had returned to their abodes, Vibhishana came to the Lord and bowed respectfully to His Lotus Feet.

"O Lord! bearer of Vishnu's bow,"
He said in voice soft, meek and low;
"Ravana, his army, Thou hast slain,
In all three worlds shall shine Thy fame,

In sin I live, no knowledge bear,
Yet Thou grants me Thy loving care.
To Thy devotee honour give,
To rest Thy limbs in palace live.

Lanka's treasures, riches then see,
Give to vanars what pleases Thee.
Thy very own, O Lord, me make,
To kingdom Thine, me also take."

Words of Vibhishana as Rama heard,
For his deep love His heart was stirred.

He said: "Brother, your words are true, and your palace is like my own,
Yet moments into ages turn, when I think of Bharat at home. 116a
In hermit's dress, in body lean, he waits me night and day,
Do that by which I meet him now, let me no more delay. 116b
If I reach after days are full, Bharat I will not see,
Thus thinking of his deep true love, Rama thrilled with ecstasy." 116c

"O Vibhishana", continued Rama, "region over Lanka for a full *kalpa* bearing My thoughts within your heart. You shall thereafter attain the Abode to which all saints go." 116d

Happily, Vibhishana went to Lanka and brought chariots filled with precious jewels and beautiful garments. He also brought the aerial chariot Pushpak and set it before the Lord.

Rama smiled and asked Vibhishana to scatter the jewels and clothes from it amidst the vanars. The Lord and Sita looked on happily as vanars joyfully picked up jewels and garments to their heart's content. Filled with pleasure they came to the Lord and bowed to him. 117

Rama thanked them again for the assistance they had given to him in the battles of Lanka and said that the demon king could not have been vanquished without their help.

Taking leave of all the vanars and demons assembled there, he mounted the aerial chariot along with Sita, Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Sugriva, Hanuman, Nal, Neel and other vanars who would not stay behind, and sped north towards Ayodhya. 118

21. THE HOMEWARD JOURNEY

As the chariot flew off, people hailed Rama, and there was a thunderous applause for Rama, His Divine Consort Sita and faithful brother Lakshmana.

Rama bowed to sages in his heart,
The aerial car northward did start.
As they left, filled in partings grief,
People stood up Lord Rama to greet.

Upon the car there was a throne,
On which Sita-Rama sat alone.
The Lord with Consort shining bright,
On Sumera's peak, like cloud and light.

The car then onward swiftly sped,
Gods rained rose petals white and red.
Three types of breezes softly blew,
Waters of seas calm gentle grew.

All good omens then did appear,
In all directions sky was clear.
Rama said: "Sita! see battlefield,
Where Lakshmana brave made Meghnad yield.

Yonder lie fiery demons stilled,
By brave Hanuman and Angad killed.
Ravana, Kumbhakarana here were slain,
The brothers who caused sages pain.

I had installed Shiva's image here, after the bridge was made,"
Along with Sita, Gracious Lord folding hands homage paid. 119a
He pointed forests one by one, in which their days were spent,
Relating names and deeds done there, as the car onwardwent. 119b

The Dandaka forests soon they reached,
Where Agastya Muni lived and preached.
Rama asked the car there to alight,
Which hearts of sages did delight.

They blessed Rama and his noble wife,
Then soon at Chitrakoot they arrived.
Lord Rama the saints there also graced,
The aerial car with speed then raced.

The Yamuna next Rama pointed out,
That end of all sins brings about.
Seeing holy Ganga, Rama thus spake:
"Our offerings, Sita, let us make.

Behold Prayag, the sacred place,
That birth death cycles does efface;
Triveni where three rivers meet,
Road that humans to Moksha does reach.

See now Ayodhya! Pure and fair!
That freedom from three pains does bear!"

Saying this, the Gracious Rama with Sita, bowed towards Ayodhya town,

With tears of joy, their hearts aglow, they saw the city of renown.

The chariot landed at Triveni, the hallowed confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. They took their bath in the holy waters and were filled with happiness at their approaching union with the people of Ayodhya. 120b

Rama asked Hanuman to go disguised as a saint to apprise Bharat of their arrival and to bring news of his welfare. While Hanuman was gone, Rama visited the great sage Bharadwaj. The sage was overcome with joy and worshipped the Lord. Though realising His Divine Form the sage blessed Rama in his earthly form of the king of Ayodhya.

Folding his hands in deepest respect, Rama took leave of the august sage. They then went aboard the chariot and crossed over the river Ganga. Rama asked for the car to land on the banks of the river.

Sita prayed to the sacred river and bowed with reverence towards its holy waters. A voice was heard from within its sacred waters, blessing Sita: "O Beautiful One!" hailed the river goddess. "May your married state be eternal".

Hearing of the arrival of Rama, Guha, the forests chieftain, hastened to meet him.

As Guha heard the Rama had come,
He hied to meet him, joy o'ercome.
With Sita, Gracious Rama he found,
In deep respect he fell to ground.

The Lord seeing his intense regard,
Raised him and clasped him to his heart.

The Gracious Lord, Ocean of Mercy, clasped him with affection deep,
In loving words his welfare asked, by His side giving him a seat.
Said Guha: "Happy am I Lord! Beholding now Thy Gracious Feet,
Abode of Peace! of actions Goal! Thy Lotus Feet I humbly greet."

Thus did the Lord clasp Guha to His heart even as he would embrace his own dear brother Bharat.

O mind, says Tulsi, reflect and consider! This Kaliyuga is the abode of sins. There is no hope of welfare in this world other than the Blissful Holy Name of Rama. 121

Thus ends Lanka Kanda
(The Book of Lanka)
The sixth book of
Ramacharitmanasa
which destroys all sins of Kaliyuga.

BOOK SEVEN

UTTARA KANDA

(The Book of the North)

I. RAMA-RAJYA

Blue hued like peacock's throat his form, Peerless 'mongst gods, Brihgu's mark bears,
Glory adorned in mantle draped, Lotus eyed, heart in Bliss e'er fares;
Bow arrows held in Lotus Hands, vanars and Lakshmana serve His Feet,
Sita's Spouse, Peerless, of Raghu's clan, on Pushpak chariot Rama I greet. 1 Sl

Kaushal's Lord's graceful Lotus Feet are greeted by both Brahma and Shiva,
By Sita's tender hands caressed, in server's heart for ever lives. 2 Sl

Spouse of Uma, the World's Mother, form shaped like conch, like kund bloom fair,
Lotus eyed Shiva! Thou Mercy takes, from passions save! O heed my prayer. 3 Sl

1. HANUMAN MEETS BHARAT

There was only one day left for the period of fourteen years of Rama's banishment to be completed. People who had waited all these years for the Lord to return were restless.

Bharat's heart was also filled with tremulous thoughts:

Of fourteen years is left one day,
In distress thinking Bharat lay.
The Lord by now should have come back,
Has he left me for love I lack?

Blessed indeed is Lakshmana's fate,
Devoted in Rama's Feet he waits.
Rama thinks me full of cunning art,
From His shelter keeps me apart.

So vile forsooth my actions are,
My sins a million lives will mar.
But hope my grieving heart doth bear,
Devotees faults Rama does not care.

Thus I am firm within my mind,
Good omens surge, Rama will be kind.
If he comes not, yet life I keep,
My days I'll spend my vice to weep.

In ocean of Rama's loneliness, as Bharat thus appeared to sink,
Disguised as saint Hanuman came, a boat to bring Bharat to brink. 1a
Bharat was seated on kush mat, crown of matted hair on head lies,
Lean form repeating: Rama! Rama! Rama! tears streaming from his Lotus eyes. 1b

Seeing him Hanuman with joy was filled,
Tears brimmed in eyes, his body thrilled.
Heart glowed within with joy and peace,
In words like nectar, did he speak:

"Whose Name you night and day repeat,
Whose glowing deeds in heart you greet;
That Rama Who grants His Bliss to all,
Comes back after heeding gods' call.

With Lakshmana, Sita by His side,
Of His victory, gods sing with pride!"
Hearing him Bharat grief forgot,
Like thirsty one had nectar got.

Said he: "Brother! thy name I seek,
Who are thou words so sweet to speak?"
"Lord I am son of Wind" he said,
"Hanuman my name, a vanar bred.

Devotee of the Lord am I."
Bharat to him at once did hie.
Heart full of love, Hanuman embraced,
In rapturous joy from eyes tears raced.

Said Bharat: "Seeing you peace I get,
As if Rama Himself I have met!
Speak now of my brothers welfare,
What can requit this favour rare!

Nothing in world is like this news,
I've asked my heart, firm are my views.
Your debt I can never repay,
Speak of Rama's deeds O friend I pray! "

Hanuman bowed to Bharat and narrated the deeds of the Lord while he lived in banishment.

Bharat then asked: "O Hanuman! Does the Merciful Rama ever remember me as his devotee? O brother! does he ever think of me?"

Hearing Bharat's gentle words of devotion, Hanuman was moved. Bowing to Bharat's feet, he hailed his pure and loving nature within his heart. Then softly he addressed Bharat: "Lord! You are dear to Rama as his own heart. My words are true O brother." 2a

Leaving Bharat in a joyous state of mind, Hanuman bowed to him and returned to Rama. 2b

2. AYODHYA WELCOMES RAMA

Joyously, Bharat came to Ayodhya and communicated the happy news to sage Vashist. He also sent word to the royal palaces that Rama was on his way to Ayodhya. The queen mothers were enraptured with joy and hastened to Bharat to hear details of the news of arrival of Rama.

The entire town knew that Rama was coming. Beautiful women filled golden plates with fruits, flowers and curds and flocked to the streets singing songs of welcome. Men surged forward in vast numbers, eager to pay respects to their beloved Rama. Bharat, accompanied by sage Vashist and younger brother Satrughan led the procession. All balconies were full of people and lusty cheers broke out as they saw the aerial chariot approaching. 3

The arrival of Rama in Ayodhya was like the rising of the full moon over the ocean. Multitudes of people appeared like the ocean and gaily dressed women running to and fro were like ripples of its waves.

Rama showed the beautiful town to those in the chariot: "O Sugriva, Angad and Vibhishana, king of Lanka!" he exclaimed, "Behold this pure and beautiful city. People praise heaven but Ayodhya surpasses the heavens in beauty. See the glamorous Saryu flowing to its north. It is a sacred river, dear unto my heart! "

When Rama saw the people approaching, he ordered the vehicle to land at the outskirts of the town. When all had alighted Rama gave leave for it to be taken back to Kuvera.

Led by Bharat the people came,
Their bodies pale, hailing Rama's Name;

Seeing Vashist as he looked around,
Rama placed his bow upon the ground.

Hastening he clasped his guru's feet,
His body thrilled the sage to meet;
When Vashist asked how he did fare?
Rama said: 'Your blessings bring welfare!'

Rama, Lord of dharma, with deep respect,
Then all assembled sages met.
Then Bharat clasped Rama's Lotus Feet,
Which Shiva, Brahma gods and sages greet.

He lay on ground and would not rise,
Rama gently raised him by his side,
His sky-blue form trembling appears,
His Lotus eyes were filled with tears.

Clasping him closely to his heart, with love's sheer joy his body glowed,
The Lord of three worlds thus rejoiced, as tears from his lotus eyes flowed.
Rama's pleasure at meeting Bharat was full of overwhelming grace,
As if Love and Adornment met, and both were standing face to face.
Rama softly asked how Bharat fared, words to reply he could not find.
That moment's joy in Bharat's heart, was beyond scope of words and mind.
Said he: "In ocean of despair, I pined for your form to behold,
In your Benign Mercy O Lord! Your hand you have given to hold!"
It was a happy reunion of touching, and beyond description.
The Lord then greeted Satrughan, enthralled clasped him to heart,
While Bharat embraced Lakshmana, brothers in deep love cast. 5

Lakshmana to meet dear Satrughan rose,
Ended separation's deep sorrows;
Bharat then bowed to Sita's Feet
With Satrughan found love filled treat.

At Rama men women enthralled gazed,
Separation's gloom from hearts erased.
As their thrilled eyes on His form stayed,
The Lord His sportive Deed displayed.

Each saw Rama standing by his side,
His greetings by custom abide;
Granting to each His Mercy's sight,
Turned people's woes to sweet delight.

The Lord met all within a trice,
Uma! this wonder none could strike;
People with deepest joy he sent,
The Gracious Lord then onward went.

Kaushilya ran with other queens,
As if a cow its calf had seen.

As if leaving its new-born calf, a cow to fields for grazing goes,
In evening runs to meet its calf, mooing as milk from udders flows,
With such love mothers met the Lord, to each He spoke in gentle words,
The anguish of loneliness ends, all were with deepest rapture stirred.
Sumitra met son Lakshmana, knew love for Rama was lain,
When Rama queen mother Kaikeyi met, her heart was filled with shame.
6a

Lakshmana met all queen mothers then, love blessings he received,
Betimes he met mother Kaikeyi, but heart with old wounds grieved. 6b

Sita her mothers-in-law greets,
In rapturous joy bowing to their feet;
For her welfare they blessings give:
'In married bliss may you e'er live!'

Rama's Lotus Feet they all behold,
In time auspicious tears withhold;
With *arati* greet in plates of gold,
Gazing on limbs, eyes fixed they hold.

Enthralled, they divers gifts bestow,
With highest bliss, their hearts aglow.
At Rama betimes Kaushilya gazed,
The Sea of Mercy! Warrior brave!

Betimes this thought her heart doth sway:
'How could he king of Lanka slay?
Both sons of mine are tender still,
Demons have strength and battle's skill.

With Lakshmana and Sita the Lord, at his dear mother gazed,
His heart was filled with rapturous joy, in thrill his body blazed. 7

Bear's, Vanar's, Lanka's kings at side,
Nala-Neel with humble grace abide;
Hanuman and other warriors great,
All forms of handsome humans take.

Bharat's nature, penance, love deep,
With warm regard, enthralled they greet;
Seeing people's thrill, joy which prevailed,
Their devotion to Rama they hailed.

Rama called his friends, asked them to meet,
Guru, and bow to holy feet.
'He is clan's guru' Lord Rama said,
'His blessings us to victory led.'

To Vashisht said: 'My friends for me,
Were like a ship in war's rough Sea;
For me they staked life without fear,
More than Bharat to me they're dear.'

Hearing Rama all with joy were filled,
Each moment brought new blissful thrill.

To bow to Queen Kaushilya's feet, then humbly they appear,
She blessings gave in highest joy: 'Like Rama to me you're dear.' 8a
Towards his palace Rama then turned, with blossoms gods then praised,
From balconies and from housetops people enraptured gazed. 8b

It was a day of rejoicings. A king met his beloved people after fourteen long years. A devoted people beheld their Lord!

3. RAMA CORONATED KING OF AYODHYA

After the warm welcome accorded to Rama by the people of Ayodhya, Rama went to the royal palaces. He first went to Kaikeyi's palace and solaced her sorrowing heart with many words of comfort. Thereafter he went to his own palace to rest his tired limbs.

Sage Vashist lost no time in summoning a meeting of elders and saints.

Addressing priests, Vashist did say:
"This is a sacred time and day.
With pleasure I seek your assent.
Rama to Ayodhya's throne ascend."

The gentle words that Vashist spoke,
Pleasure in all hearts did evoke,
Each did his noble words commend,
Rama would Ayodhya's fame defend.

They said: "Delay now not O sage,
For Rama's enthronement now arrange."

The sage then asked Sumentra to make arrangements to proclaim Rama king,
He rose at once and orders gave, royal horses and coaches to bring. 10a
Messengers hastened far and wide to carry forth the happy news,
All done Sumentra bowed to Vashist, his happy heart with joy infused. 10b

The city decked with gems and lights,
Gods rained from heavens flowers bright.
Rama asked his men to first attend,
On vanars and from Lanka friends.

To draw their baths attendants hied,
They laid new dresses by their side.
Rama himself gave Bharat his care,
With his hands combed his matted hair.

The Lord's deep love and Bharat's fate,
A million words cannot relate.
Then Rama loosened his unkempt hair,
With Vashist's leave went to prepare.

He bathed and wore his jewels bright,
Of his form Kama would envy sight!

Sita was bathed by Rama's mother, her lovely lustrous body shone,
With shimmering clothes and bright jewels, Kaushilya decked her earthly form. 11a
Seated on throne by left of Rama, she shone with beauty and with grace,
The queen mothers filled with deep joy beheld her lovely gentle face. 11b
Hearing the news Brahma, Shiva and gods, came from their heavenly abode,
To witness the rejoicings great, on heavenly chariots quickly rode. 11c

Sage Vashist was filled with delight,
The jewelled throne was glittering bright.
Like dazzling sun the royal throne shone,
When Sita Rama did it adorn.

Seeing Rama and Sita side by side,
In sages hearts peace did abide.
Amidst the chanting of Vedas hymns,
All gods and sages hailed the king!

Sage Vashist applied the tilak mark upon Rama's forehead. Tunes of celestial music came down from the heavens. Gandharvas and kinnars

sang melodious songs and apsaras danced celebrating the great occasion.

4. THE VEDAS HYMN TO THE LORD

After singing hymns to the Lord, the gods departed to their own abodes. Then the four Vedas themselves in disguise came and sung to the Glory of the Lord. Even the Vedas requested to grant them His eternal devotion. 12a

When the gods had sung their praises, to their own abodes they hied,
Then the vedas themselves arrived there with their faces well disguised. 12b

Gracious Rama gave them due honour, All Knowing Lord had recognized,
None else knew them as they hailed Him with deep and devoted pride. 12c

"O Lord of Attributes and the Absolute! Dazzling Lord of Mercy! Rama!
Ravana and the wicked demons lay slain by Thy mighty arm.
Vice, O Rama, Thou burnt to ashes, Earth's burden on shoulder lay.
Mercy's Ocean, God Incarnate! Sita, Thee we hail today.
By Thy unfathomable Maya, gods humans and life exist,
Steeped in circumstances, actions, in birth death cycles persist.
Lord! Those who attain Thy Mercy, from the three pains find relief,
Saviour of life and death cycles, grant Thy Mercy we beseech.
Those who proud of their own learning, Thy devotion have not seeked.
Have to fall back from attainments that they have by Knowledge reached.
But those renouncing all ambitions, with deep faith devotion seek,
Are liberated without effort, by Thy Name, such Lord we greet!
Feet that Shiva and Brahma worship, Feet that Ahalya did redeem,
Feet from which Ganga emerges, Feet that gods, sages esteem,
Delicate Feet of marks of Lotus, bearing forests thorns and heat,
O Gracious Rama! we are engrossed in worship of those Holy Feet!
Shastras liken Thy Prakriti to a tree of endless roots,
Four barks, six boughs, twenty five branches, bearing sweet and bitter fruit;
Countless leaves and many flowers, single vine growing on the tree,
Lord, beseeching such trees shelter, Gracious Rama, we greet Thee!
Brahma is Unborn, Non-Dual, known by Knowledge, beyond mind,
Those who meditate may do so, in Thy attributes peace we find.
O Lord! Abode of Peace and Qualities only boon for which we pine,
Is Thy desireless devotion, in speech and action and in mind."
In presence of those assembled, Vedas sung this humble prayer,
Then departed from Ayodhya to Brahma's kingdom into air. 13a

5. LORD SHIVA'S HYMN TO RAMA

Lord Shiva, who had told Rama that he would visit him in Ayodhya on the occasion of his coronation, came after the Vedas had departed. Shiva spoke to Rama in voice full of emotion: 13b

O Rama! Resplendent! Lustrous glow!
Deliverer from birth cycles woe!
The gods their hopes in Thy Feet lay,
A boon I crave: 'Shelter me pray!

Ten headed Ravana Thou struck dead,
Rid earth of all her fear and dread.
The wicked demons moths became,
To ashes burnt in Thy bows flame.

The earthly orb Thou doth adorn,
Bow, arrow, quiver grace Thy form.
Like rays of sun strong is Thy might,
Dispelling pride, attachment's night.

Kama strikes humans with passion's dart,
Like Bhil aims arrows at deers' heart.
In woods of sense pleasures they pine,
Save them, O Lord, by Mercy Thine.

Deeply afflicted people groan,
Disrespect to Thy Feet have shown.
Those mortals who love not Thy Feet,
Lie in birth cycles' ocean deep.

Who faith in Thy Feet have not found,
In woes and sorrows they are bound.
Mortals who Thy deeds bear in mind,
For saints and gods deep love thy find.

Free from attachments, greed and pride,
Unmoved by joy or grief abide.
Sages therefore devotion seek,
In disciplines hope they do not keep.

Steadfast in love and pure in heart,
From Thy devotion do not part,
Treating praise and censure the same,
Peaceful they live on earth such saints.

Bee of sages lotus mind calm!
O warrior great! Unvanquished Rama!
Thy Name, O pride's foe, I repeat,
Balm for life cycles! Thee I greet!

Of Grace and Mercy Hallowed ground,
I greet Thee Lord, devotion bound.
O Raghu's Lord! Doubts set at rest,
O Earth's defender! make me blest!

What I crave Lord, I now repeat, Grant me devotion of Thy Feet,
O Lakshmi's lord! Grant me this boon! may I devotees company keep. 14a
Thus singing of the glory of Rama, Lord Shiva departed for his abode in Kailash. 14b

6. DEPARTURE OF VIBHISHANA AND VANARS

Six months had passed since Rama was coronated king of Ayodhya. His friends who had accompanied him from Lanka had lived in peace and contentment and had not even felt the passage of time. Rama then called them together and implored them to return to their homes. 15

"My friends!" said Rama, "You have served me with zeal. In what words can I praise you and your unflinching devotion? For my welfare you have left comforts of your own homes. I regard my brothers, this kingdom and its wealth, my queen and my body, my home, family and friends with deep love. But I love you more than all of these."

"This is My nature. All love those who serve them, but My devotees are dearest to My heart. Return now to your homes, my good friends."

Rama first called Sugriva. King of vanars and presented him with beautiful garments and ornaments, which Bharat placed upon him with his own hands. Then he asked Lakshmana to make similar presents to Vibhishana, king of Lanka. Angad remained seated, gazing at the Lord with deep devotion.

Presents of jewels, and garments, according to custom, were also made to Jambwan, Nal and Neel. After receiving the blessings of the Lord they departed. 17

Angad then stood up and bowed to the Lord. "When my father Bali died", he said, "he had placed me under your care. You are my guru, father, mother and everything else. Where can I go now, O Lord? Let me serve you. I shall do as you please. O Merciful Rama! Do not send me away from you."

Rama clasped Angad to his heart and solaced him with many words. He took off his own necklace and garlanded Angad with it. 18

Bharat himself then went to reach them upto the gates of the palace. Hanuman bowed to Sugriva, king of vanars, and said he would return to Kishkindha after staying for some more time in Ayodhya.

After Vibhishana and Sugriva along with the vanars had departed, Rama called Guha, the forest chieftain. Presenting him with jewels and garments, the Lord bade him an affectionate farewell.

7. RAMA-RAJYA: THE KINGDOM OF RAMA

The reign of Rama in the kingdom of Ayodhya was marked with peace and prosperity of the people. The fame of Ayodhya and its noble king spread throughout the world and the influence of righteousness preached by the Lord spread into other kingdoms.

In famed Ayodhya when Rama reigned.
Misery ended, peace prevailed.
No one was any one's foe,
None was high and none was low.

In four ashrams, in their duties, people lived by Veda's precepts.
Neither fear nor woes assailed them, no ill health no wiles in concepts. 20

Pain in spirit, body, mind,
In Rama's reign one could not find.
All born of the human race,
Did their work with love and grace.

Dharma fulfilled by all four means,
No one sinned even in dreams.
In devotion all were steeped,
All salvations pleasure reaped.

Neither pains nor death ere time,
All were healthy, spritely, fine.
None was poor, oppressed or weak,
None unlettered, virture lacked.

All accomplished, without pride,
All were loving, righteous wise.
All respected qualities, learning,
Wileless, others virtues hailing.

Maya's sorrows, evil actions, none affected in Rama's reign,
All were free from earthly troubles, peace contentment to all came. 21

Rama was known in all nations,
Famed in lands of seven oceans:

In each pore of Whom worlds gather,
For Him fame was of no matter.

To speak of fame of Rama the Lord,
Is vain indeed knowing He is God.
Yet knowing Rama was Incarnated One,
All sung glory of Dashratha's son!

Devotion in His life on earth,
Frees mortals from cycles of birth.
Peace that in Rama's reign was derived,
In words cannot be e'er described.

All were selfless, loving and brave,
To saints devoted, alms all gave
Each man virtuous, loving his wife,
Woman was true throughout her life.

Canes were carried by saints only, difference in musical notes,
Control for mind's yearnings only, no one lawless, none used force. 22

Trees bore blossoms and fruits sweet,
As friends did tigers elephants meet.
Birds and beasts each loved the other,
Fearlessly they lived together.

Birds sung sweetly amidst trees,
Cattle grazed in woods in peace.
Cool gentle fragrant breeze blew,
Bees with nectar buzzed and flew.

Honey dripped from hives on trees,
Cows gave milk as much one pleased
Crops were sumptuous in the fields,
Heavens bliss the earth did yield.

Knowing Rama the worlds did hold,
Mines of gems did hills unfold.
All rivers' waters clear and chaste,
Pure and cool, of pleasant taste.

Oceans waves spread not on lands,
Pearls lay scattered on the sands.
Lotus did in lakes abound,
In ten directions peace one found.

Moonlight gave coolness, sunlight warmth, winds cool, fragrant and

calm.
Clouds gave rain as much as needed, such was the reign of Rama. 23

Many yajna were done by Rama,
To many saints gave bounteous alms.
He dharma upheld as Vedas enjoined,
No qualities bound, yet wealth enjoyed.

Sita in whom glory resides,
For e'er by Rama's wishes abides.
Knowing His Majesty, Sita meek,
In mind and action serves His Feet.

Though many men and maids there dwell,
To do all work swiftly and well.
Yet Sita herself serves all needs.
In everything Rama's wishes heeds.

All what she finds her Rama will please,
To do by herself she does seek.
Serving all with devotion deep,
In heart she has no pride, conceit.

Such Sita with all grace replete,
Whom gods with praises seek to greet;

Such Sita glances not at gods, though for her blessings they compete,
Sweet Sita with devotion deep, serves always Lord Rama's Gracious Feet. 24

All brothers lived together in peace. The Lord treated his brothers with deep affection discoursing to them on statecraft and righteousness.

Two sons, Lava and Kush were born to Sita. They were both gentle and handsome and grew up to be great warriors.

8. RAMA'S DISCOURSE ON THE NATURE OF SAINTS AND WICKED ONES

Once Rama along with his brothers and devoted Hanuman went to see the gardens of his palace. On that occasion the sages known as Sankadi arrived there. Bowing to the sages, Rama enquired of their welfare. He paid due honour to them, spreading for them his own mantle to take their seat upon. 32

The sages gazed upon the resplendent glory of the Lord. While they beheld His sky blue form and lotus eyes, Rama gently spoke to them. "O

wise sages" he said, "I am blessed today by your presence. It is only one's good fate that leads one to the company of saints."

"For indeed! company of saints is the path to Moksha, even as company of men of passions leads to the vicious circle of life death cycles. This is the precept of Vedas, Puranas and sages." 33

Hearing Lord four munis were pleased,
They prayed to Rama with rapture siezed:
'Hail Endless Lord! One! E'er Unchanged,
Sinless! for Mercy Forms attains.

Hail Formless! Sea of Qualities hail!
Wise! Glamorous! Welfare's Temple hail!
Lakshmi's Lord! Earth's Sustainer hail!
Unborn! Unending! Non-Pariel!

Wisdom's Store! Prideless! Bestows fame!
Vedas, Puranas sing Thy Glorious Name.
Essence reveals! Love is Thy fame!
Nameless, yet known by many Names.

Thou pervades all, sans Maya's Art,
Thou takes Abode in every heart.
Redeems life cycles, anguish, woes,
Rama! free from Pride and Passion's throes.

Thou art Highest Bliss, Merciful, Fulfiller of desires of hearts,
Steadfast devotion to us grant, Glory and Grace's Mine Thou art! 34

Rama! grant us pure devotion's way,
From births, three pains to turn away.
Wish Bearing Cow! Wish Bearing Tree!
Devotion's boon we beg from Thee.

Agastya, life cycles Sea to end,
Easy to reach! Eager to fend!
O friend of meek! end woes of mind,
Grant us Discernment's way to find.

Thou ends Desire, Envy and Fear,
Detachment, Grace and Prayer appear;
Thou earth Adorns! O King of kings!
Grant Love's boat o'er Life's Sea to bring.

O Swan for saints Manas-like mind,
Brahma, Shiva in Thy Feet rapture find;

Raghu's Flag! Thou protects Vedas Speech,
From bonds of Death, Fates, Qualities freed.

Redeemer! Thou redeems all sins,
O Tulsi's Lord! Thou Glory brings!

Betimes hailing the Name of Rama, t'wards Rama's Lotus Feet turned,
Rama granted them the boon they craved, to Brahma's Abode returned.35

Sanakadi to their abodes returned,
To bow to Rama the brothers turned;
In timid silence brothers stood,
T'wards Son of Wind for help they looked.

They yearned to hear Rama, Wise and Kind,
To clear distractions of their minds.
To Hanuman All-Knowing Lord then said:
"Why do my brothers seem so vexed?"

Then Hanuman spoke with folded hands:
"O Lord! Bharat here shyly stands,
In heart some thoughts perplexed remain,
He seeks to ask—regard restrains."

Said Rama: "My nature you know well,
'Twixt me Bharat, doth difference dwell?"
Bharat fell to Lord's Lotus Feet:
"Thou Mercy grants, who shelter seek.

I have no doubts within my mind, nor e'en in dreams I distress face,
O Confluence of Mercy and Bliss! this is fruit of Thy Love and Grace! 36

I seek because in heart I know,
Devotees Mercy thou doth show.
In many ways the Vedas explain,
Virtues and qualities of saints.

Thou Thyself speakest in their praise,
Their love in Thy heart joy doth raise.
Mercy's Ocean, God Incarnate!
Nature of saints to me narrate.

Between the wicked and the saint,
The difference Lord, to me explain.
Saints' nature has virtues untold",
Said Rama, thus Vedas Purana unfold.

"The virtuous and the wicked's acts,
Are like sandal tree and the axe.
The axe to cut a tree is made,
Yet tree gives fragrance to its blade.

For virtue sandalwood is blessed, its paste adorns forehead of saints,
Heated and hammered axe's blade, suffers for virtue that it taints. 37

Of sense pleasures saints have no trace,
Treasures of qualities and of grace.
From pride attachments they are freed,
From anger, passion, lust and greed.

Gentle in heart, by nature kind,
Devoted in speech action mind.
Who others lauds, his own fame shuns
Dear to me Bharat are such ones.

Desireless, who on me depend,
Humble and calm, to all a friend.
Gentle, simple, contentment filled,
Respect for sages, dharma instilled;

Brother, whose nature has these traits,
He is a saint, devout and straight.
From sense pleasures he thoughts restraints,
From words and feeling harsh abstains.

Treating praise and censure alike, saints are devoted in My Feet,
Abode of qualities, mild and kind, dear unto My heart them I treat. 38

Now wicked's nature I'll reveal,
Do not with such vile people deal,
Their company to misfortune leads,
Like good cow spoilt amidst low breeds.

Their hearts with woe for e'er besieged,
At other's welfare frenzy seized.
In slanderous talk bearing delight,
As if they have earned treasures bright.

Abodes of lust, greed, pride and wrath,
Cruel, cunning, sinful their path.
In causeless strife 'gainst others turn,
For good deeds done, evil return.

False are their aims of give and take,
False are the boastful talks they make.
Sweet as nectar appears their speech,
But poison strong in heart they keep.

In others always finding faults, of others seeking wealth and wife,
They're demons born in human form, for every thing are seeking strife.39

The purpose of their life is greed,
Like beasts, lusts hunger seek to feed.
Others' good deeds fill them with pain,
Hearing them hurts their self pride vain.

Seeing others' plight that ill fate brings,
They feel contented like a king.
Stirring strife for their selfish need,
In anger moved by lust and greed.

Guru and parents do not heed.
Like self others to their end lead.
In stubborn self will others dare,
Neither for saints nor gods deeds care.

Oceans of vice, knowledge they lack,
Lustful, precepts of dharma attack.
Greedy of wealth at virtues price,
Simple in looks yet full of vice.

Such low and vile people are not found in Satyayuga and Tretayuga. There will be some like them in Dvaparyuga; and in Kaliyuga they will be found in abounding numbers." 40

"Brother!" continued Rama, "there is no dharma better than striving for the welfare of others, and no sin worse than seeking to harm others. This is the precept of Vedas.

Those who are blest with mortal life, yet bring grief to others, have to bear the woes of birth death cycles.

Besieged with attachments and selfish ends, some humans live in sin. They lose salvation.

For them I am Death and I dispense Divine Justice for their actions,
Knowing this, the wise devote themselves to Me."

Thus I have narrated the nature of saints and evil men. Those who have understood these qualities do not get bound in the cycles of rebirth.

"Brothers! Both good and bad qualities are strands in the Web of Maya. Discernment lies in being above all qualities. To get involved in them is folly." 41

9. THE LORD'S SERMON

Rama ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya with wisdom and preached righteousness to his people.

Once Rama invited sage Vashist, saints and citizens of Ayodhya to his royal assembly, "O people of my kingdom", he said, "I speak to you today not as your sovereign, nor with any desire in my heart. My words are for the cause of righteousness. Listen to me therefore, without fear and hesitation.

Brother! If what I say agrees not with you, let me know. If my words please you, act accordingly.

To be born a human is a Divine blessing. Even gods do not receive such honour. In a human body, the mind is the abode of thought and concentration. It is thus the gateway to salvation.

He who avails not the opportunity of seeking liberation, regrets his actions in future births. In ignorance he blames Times, Fates and even God Himself for misfortunes that are only of his own doings. 43

Brothers! the body is not given for the enjoyment of sense pleasures. Consider not pleasures of the world to be real; for pleasures even of heavens are few and ultimately lead to turmoil. Therefore those blessed with a human body, yet are lost in sense pleasures, foolishly yearn for poison, rejecting elixir that is within their reach.

The immortal jiva is contained in four forms of life. It is those born of ground, those arising from dirt, those emerging from eggs and those born of wombs. Encompassed by Maya, and under influence of Times, Actions, Nature and Qualities, jiva enters various forms.

Fortunate indeed is the one blessed with life in human form.

The human body is the ship which can take one across the ocean of human existence. My Mercy is its favourable wind. Gurus are oarsmen of the ship. A difficult crossing can thus be easily accomplished. One who does not avail these simple helps for reaching the ocean's shore, is foolish. He is a wretched one who rejects God's greatest gift and commits suicide. 44

Mark My words and take heed of them if you want peace in this world and in the hereafter.

Brothers! the path of My devotion is simple and brings contentment. Vedas and Puranas have sung of its glory.

The path of Knowledge is difficult and many hindrances lie in its way. It is difficult to follow and the heart gets no shelter nor encouragement on the long journey that has to be undertaken to achieve life's mission. Even if attained by overcoming difficulties, one does not achieve Blissful contentment because one has not sought Divine Love.

Devotion is independent of everything else. But it cannot be achieved without communion with saints and sages. Without embracing righteousness, communion with saints is not possible. Therefore, righteousness and devotion in Me is the way to attain liberation from birth death cycles.

There is in the world, one single course to be followed to achieve righteousness. This is to seek devotion of saints with mind, action and speech. He who renouncing guile serves them with humble devotion, earns favours of gods and sages.

There is another essential requirement that I unfold to you with humble earnestness. Unless one is attuned to Shankara's worship, one cannot attain My devotion. 45

Consider how simple is the path of devotion! It needs not yoga, sacrifice, renunciation nor fasting! It requires only a gentle nature, free from wile and contentment in what one has.

He who is devoted to Me, yet seeks favours of other humans, does not really have true faith in Me, for he has not surrendered everything unto Me. This is briefly the principle of My devotion.

He who seeks not anyone's enmity, nor quarrels with anyone; he who does not expect anything from anyone, nor is afraid of anyone, for him all directions lead to peace and happiness.

He who performs actions without seeking fruits thereof; whose mind is free from worldly attachments; who is sinless and free from arrogance and wrath, he whom all pleasures, yes, even heaven and liberation, are small compared with ecstasy of My devotion; he who praises devotees and champions their cause, yet opposes not another convictions; he who desists from futile arguments; he who depends only on Me and My Name; he who is free from attachments, pride and desires; Such a one attains; pleasures and peace of Eternal Bliss and Godliness! " 46

Thus spoke the Lord to His Beloved creation.

"O Uma!" Shiva said, "men and women of Ayodhya were the image of Blessedness and Supreme Fulfilment, dwelling in the kingdom in which their king was Glamorous, the Incarnation of Vishnu, the Eternal Truth-Consciousness-Bliss. 47

Once sage Vashist came to the place,
Which Rama, Abode of Pleasure, graced.
With deep regard Rama rose to greet,
Made humble oblations to feet.

'O Rama!' the sage folded hands spake,
'I come to Thee a prayer to make.
I have beheld Thy earthly Deeds,
My heart to Attachment lead.

E'en Vedas know not Bliss of Thy state,
It's Glory how can I narrate.'
Priest's functions do not future mend,
Vedas Puranas too do not command;

Surya's priesthood made me hesitate,
Bramha told me: 'Son, blest is your fate,
Lord comes as human Incarnate,
Thus honoured shall be Surya's clan great'.

Enthralled I thought fruits of penance, yoga yajna and prayers all,
I shall achieve as Surya's clan's priest, can dharma have higher call! 48

To meditate; what yoga ordains,
All that Smriti's precepts contain;
Yajna, shrines, sense control, wisdom's aim,
All dharma stated by Vedas and saints;

Of Tantra, Vedas and Puranas: the root
To hear and read, Lord, has one fruit;
Steadfast devotion in Thy Feet,
Of all disciplines this is fruit sweet.

If washed by dirt, can dirt be cleaned?
By water churned, can one get cream?
O Rama! without Love's water pure,
One cannot clean the heart impure.

He is all-wise, he essence knows,
He is Qualities from which Grace flows;
He is skilled, with good signs replete,
Who is e'er engrossed in Thy Feet.

Merciful Lord! to me this grant, this boon alone from Thee beseech,
In all births, Rama, love in Thy Feet, may e'er increase never decrease." 49

After Vashist returned from the royal palace, Rama along with his brothers and Hanuman went around the city, meeting his people to assure himself of their welfare. He then left the city gates and rested in a mango grove near by. Narada muni came there on that occasion:

Narada muni then there appeared, with Veena cymbals his,
The rapturous Glory of the Lord, singing in highest bliss. 50

'Lotus eyed Rama! Grant me Thy sight!
Thy Mercy's glance makes woes take flight;
Thy Form's hue blue lotus imparts,
Like bee roves in Shiva's lotus heart.

Thou vanquished demons' warriors' might,
Ends sins, to munis brings delight;
To saints bliss grants, like rain for fields,
Shelters homeless, to meek hope yields.

Earth's burden lifted in arm lain,
Khara, Dushana, Viradh by Thee slain;
Ravana's foe! Bliss! King amongst kings!
Moon's joy to Lily of Surya brings.

In Vedas Puranas Tantra, Glory known,
Gods munis hail in rapture borne;
Thou kindness deals, pride doth efface,
Peerless Thou art famed Kaushal's Grace!

Thy Name doth sins of Kaliyuga churn,
Tulsi's Lord saves to Him who turn.'

Narada thus hailed Merciful Rama, form in devotion bent,
Image of Glory's Sea in heart, to Brahma's Abode he went. 51

II. THE EPILOGUE

1. DOUBTS OF GARUDA, KING OF BIRDS

Shiva then said to his consort Parvati: "O beautiful one! I have narrated the dazzling story of Lord Rama. The deeds of the Lord are infinite. Even Saraswati, the goddess of speech, cannot relate all of them.

Lord Rama is Eternal; His Qualities are eternal; His birth, deeds and Name are eternal. Drops of water in oceans or particles of dust on earth may be counted but deeds of the Lord cannot be exhaustively narrated. O Uma! I have related to you the sacred story of Rama, as expounded by the great Kakabhusundi to Garuda, king of Birds. Tell me now, O Bhawani, what else do you wish to know?"

Parvati was thrilled with the story of the Deeds of Rama she had heard from Shiva. "Blessed indeed I am," she said, "that I have heard the Glory of Rama which redeems the fear of continuing cycles or rebirth on earth.

I have attained fulfilment by your kindness," she told Shiva. "I am now free from illusions. I have understood the power of Rama Who is Truth-Consciousness-Bliss. 52a

Hearing Rama's Deeds from Thee, O Lord, like nectar from moon rains,
My mind is filled with their sweet bliss, but yearnings still remain. 52b

Hearing Rama's Deed who are fulfilled,
Have not yet known their glory's thrill;
E'en sages from life cycles freed,
For ever crave to hear His Deeds.

Who wants the Sea of Life to cross,
Rama's Deeds is boat to take across.
Who have no love for Deeds of Rama,
Their souls they themselves seek to harm.

Lord! Ramacharitmanasa you sing,
To hear the highest bliss doth bring;
You've said these Deeds enthralling words,
Garuda from Kakabhusundi had heard.

With such deep wisdom of the Soul, such love in Rama's Feet lain,
For crow to earn devotion's boon, this doubt in mind remains. 53

'Mongst thousands who have taken birth,
Just one upholds dharma on the earth;
'Mongst thousands dwelling on dharma's path,
Only one from Senses' bonds parts;

'Mongst crores so freed the Srutis say,
Only one finds deep wisdom's way;
'Mongst crores of wise men only one,
Can claim to have liberation won;

'Mongst thousands who liberated fare,
In Brahma engrossed to find is rare.
In dharma, detachment, wisdom firm,
Liberated, who Brahma's Knowledge earn;

To find one such is rarer still,
Who Maya freed, earns Rama's Love's thrill.
How crow could such rare Love attain,
Lord of Universe! to me explain!

Engrossed in Rama, with wisdom blessed, whom all qualities adorn,
Why was such great Kakabhusundi, of crow given a form?" 54

Shiva was pleased with Parvati's devotion to Rama. "Listen to the pure deeds," he said, "hearing which all doubts are removed. Garuda, the king of Birds had also asked a similar question from Kakabhusundi himself. Listen to that wondrous story with attention."

He told her how he had to renounce her as his Consort in her previous birth when she had taken the form of Sita to put Rama's Divinity to test.

Thereafter he had spent his days in forests. During his sojourn in the woods he had come to a beautiful mountain north of Mount Sumera. This lovely hill had four peaks surrounding a lake of shimmering beauty.

The water of the lake were cool and sweet. It contained lovely lotus blooms of many colours. Swans sported in the lake and bees hummed over lotus flowers. 56

Kakabhusundi lived there, eternally singing of the glory of the Deeds of Rama.

"O Parvati!" Shiva said, "this was where I took the form of a swan and heard Kakabhusundi narrate the sacred story of Rama." 57

"I will tell you now how doubts arose in Garuda's mind and how he went to Kakabhusundi to remove them."

Shiva asked Parvati to recollect that the great sage Narada had sent Garuda to swallow snakes that Meghnad had caused to coil around Rama and vanars in one of the battles of the war of Lanka. After he had fulfilled Narada's commands, Garuda was beset with doubts as to how one who lay helpless with snakes coiled around him could be the incarnation of God?

He then went to seek enlightenment from Narada.

"O Garuda!" Narada said, "grave doubts have arisen in your heart. I will not be able to dispel them. You should go to Brahma and seek his advice."

Thus said Narada and departed, singing of the Deeds of Rama and marvelling at the might of His Maya. 59

When Garuda came to Brahma and related his errand,

Brahma realized that learned and lettered, all were enmeshed in Maya's web. He directed Garuda to seek Shiva and beseech him to dispel his doubts.

"When Garuda met me," Shiva told Parvati, "I was going to visit Kuvera and you were residing at our abode at Kailash. Garuda bowed to me and stated his problem.

"I told him that it would not be possible for me to dispel his doubts while I was on my journey. Knowing that his doubts could be resolved in company of saints, I directed him to Kakabhusundi.

Garuda thanked me and proceeded to the abode of Kakabhusundi beyond the Sumera Mountains."

2. GARUDA MEETS KAKABHUSUNDI

Journeying beyond Sumera Mountains, Garuda reached the abode of Kakabhusundi. Even as he reached the serene place, he was pervaded with peace. He saw Kakabhusundi ready to address a gathering on the glorious deeds of Rama.

Kakabhusundi greeted the king of birds and requested him to intimate the purpose of his visit.

"O brother!" exclaimed Garuda, "The purpose of my visit is already fulfilled. Pray proceed now to relate the glorious deeds of Rama!" 63

Thus Garuda sat amongst the gathering and heard with wrapt attention the glorious and sacred story of Rama as narrated by Kakabhusundi.

Garuda's doubts were removed and his body was filled with ecstasy. He humbly told Kakabhusundi that his heart was now at ease and was immersed in Divine devotion of the Lord.

Kakabhusundi solaced Garuda. "O King of birds!" he said, "it is not surprising that you were beset with doubts. Even great Narada, Brahma, Shiva and the wise sages Sankadi were assailed with doubts at various times.

Who has Attachment left immune?
Who has not danced to Passion's tune?
Whose mind Envy has not deranged?
Whose heart Anger has not inflamed?

Who is so learned, qualities bears, renunciant, warrior, poet or saint,
Where in the world is born the man whose life Temptation does not taint? 70a

Who has not Wealth to guile inclined or Power make others need feel not?
Who born on earth by fawn-like eyes of maiden fair has not been caught? 70b

Who has not Qualities Modes caused woes?
Who swayed not in Pride Vanity's throes?
Who has not maiden's charms inflamed?
Who has compelling love not shamed?

Who has not burned in jealousy's flame,
Who has not storms of Sorrow faced?
Which heart Worry eats not like snake?
Who Maya does not captive make?

Desires are ants for form-like wood,
Who has body's desires withstood?
In progeny, wealth, fame's madness wrought,
Who has for these not wisdom lost?

All these are powerful Maya's kins,
Who can o'er their might, numbers, win?
Forces which o'er Brahma, Shiva prevail,
No wonder if earthly born fail.

Maya's bold army world invades, Kama's Passions six command its flanks,
Arrogance, Vice, Deceit and Guile are mighty warriors in its ranks. 71a
This Maya is handmaid of Rama, though learned know she is unreal,
Till Rama His Mercy does not grant, forsooth the unreal looks like real. 71b

Maya which makes the world to dance,
Remains unseen for e'en a glance.
That Maya with kins, Rama obeys,
Dances as He eyebrows doth raise.

Rama is that Truth, Consciousness, Bliss,
Unborn, Mighty, the Essence is,
Pervading All, Endless, Complete,
Chanceless His power, Glory replete.

Non-Pariel, Beyond Maya, Speech,
All-Seeing, Sinless, o'er Senses reach.
Sans Passions, Bonds, Eternal, One,
Abode of Bliss, Attached to none.

Powerful, o'er Nature, in all hearts,
Bramha, Constant, Firm, Desires apart.
In Rama Attachments find no place,
Can Darkness ever bright sun face?

For His devotees, Rama the Lord, to take a human form was pleased,
And then in ways of common men, to bring us peace did dazzling Deeds. 72a
Like Actor taking diverse forms, performs of different plays their Acts,
While he remains his own real self, his mood and actions sequence match. 72b

This is the nature of Rama's Deeds,
To delude demons, servers please.
Lost in sense pleasures, evil minds
Blame Lord when painful bonds them bind.

With eyes distortion those who ail,
Moon's silvery light they see as pale.
Sense of direction when impaired,
One says Sun from the west has fared.

One thinks world moves, sailing on boat,
Thinks he himself is still, afloat.

In rounds whirl children, think world turns,
In needless wrangling, wrathful burn.

Of Lord's Delusion such is fame,
To minds confound is not His aim.
The wretched, dull, in Maya wrought,
The Fateless ones whose minds are fogged,

Luckless ones, in Suspicion lain,
In wilful ignorance Lord Rama blame.

Pride, passion, greed and wrath instilled, for such their home is painful woe,
They dwell on earth like in a well, of Rama's sweet Bliss they cannot know. 73a

The Formless Lord one comprehends, the form Incarnate puzzling finds,
The Deeds of Lord of Qualities, thus confuse even sages' minds." 73b

"Listen O Garuda!" said Kakabhusundi, "to the greatness of Rama and the manner in which I was besieged with delusion. Rama destroys all pride and Ego, because vanity is the root cause of distress. This the Lord does for the benefit of His devotees. 74

When Rama took birth in Ayodhya, I went there to witness celebrations of His birth. I assumed the form of a small crow and stayed there for five years. I followed Child Rama wherever He went. I ate morsels of food dropped from His plate in the palace courtyard. 75

Child Rama played endearingly in the royal palace. He danced when He saw His shadow and laughed merrily at His own image. He chased me in innocent frolic and when I flew away He cried. When I came to Him again, He would turn around and run. I was perplexed at the naive deeds of the Divine Lord. 77

This momentary doubt placed me in the spell of the Lord's Maya. Seeing my perplexed mind, He laughed and ran to catch me. I flew away and when I turned around to see Him, I was amazed to find His small outstretched hands near me. I flew away further, even upto Bramha's Abode, but whenever I turned back I found His arms near my body. Ultimately I found His fingers almost touching me. 79

In my perplexion I closed my eyes and behold! when I opened them again I was in Ayodhya. Child Rama laughed as He saw my discomfort.

As soon as He opened His mouth I entered His body. I saw the entire galaxy of the Universe within Him. Brahma, Shiva, infinite number of stars, the Sun, the Moon and the earth, its mountains, rivers and forests.

I saw the Creation which I had never seen, heard of, or even envisaged,

of awesome vision and enthralling grandeur. 80a

Enraptured by the exquisite panorama of millions of celestial bodies, I felt as if I had spent hundreds of years watching them. 80b

Wherever I turned my eyes I saw vast aspects of Creation in which everything became different from what I had last seen except for the form of Rama which had the same endearing Grace everywhere. 81a

I beheld the same Child Rama bearing the same Glory wherever I turned my eyes. 81b

My mind became weary and weak with the vastness and wonder of what I saw before me. Finding me in anguish, Merciful Rama laughed again and I came out of His mouth. 82a

I saw Child Rama playing in front of me as before. He repeated his innocent pranks of running to catch me, teasing me and smiling at me mischievously. I tried to fathom the grandeur of the vision I had seen, but my anguished mind remained confused. 82b

I was besieged with remorse. 'O Shelterer of the distressed! Save me! Save me!' I cried and fell on the ground. The Lord saw my anguish and He withdrew His bewildering Maya. He placed His Lotus Hand upon me and solaced me, ending my distress. Tears of devotion flowed from my eyes and I implored His Mercy. The Lord heard my words with Compassion and then spoke in a soft serene voice: 83a

'O Kakabhusundi! Know Me to be pleased. Seek a boon of your choice. The eight siddhis, the treasures of all comforts, Salvation, Wisdom;

Discernment, the Essence of Knowledge and all other qualities which are beyond the reach of munis, I shall grant to you according to your desire'.

The Lord's words filled me with rapturous Love; but it occurred to me that the Lord had offered me all comforts yet had not talked of His devotion. All qualities and comforts without Devotion are as insipid as most tempting food prepared without salt.

'O Lord!' I implored, 'if you are pleased with me, and you wish to grant me Mercy, O Knower of all hearts! I beg of you my most cherished desire. Grant me Thy steadfast and eternal Devotion which is glorified in Vedas and Puranas; which great munis seek for ever but which is earned by few, only through Thy Mercy.' 84

'So be it,' said the Lord. 'You are wise by nature, and you have asked for that Mine of Peace and Fulfilment which sages seek by arduous yoga and meditation. Delusions of Maya shall never besiege you. Know Me to be the Endless, Unborn, Attributeless Bramha and Abode of Qualities. 85a

Devotees are for ever dear to Me. Knowing this, be devoted to My Feet, in mind, speech and body. 85b

Hear now the precepts of My Personal Principles. Bear them in mind

and renouncing everything, engage yourself in singing of My Glory.

Of My Maya world is conceived,
In which are diver's forms of jiva.
I love them all, of Me they're born,
But humans are my dearest form.

'Mongst men: twice born; of them Vedas read;
More than Vedas scholars, dharma who tread;
'Mongst them: detached; of them the wise;
'Mongst them: who know where Essence lies.

Much more devotees' love I tend,
Who leave all hopes, on Me depend.
This is My Principle, I repeat:
Devotee's love dearest I treat.

From Love to Knowledge those who turn,
Like other souls My Grace they earn;
But one devoted may be low,
I love his heart: this clearly know.

On server wise, gentle and pure, who does not love bestow?
Hearken to Me O Kakabhusundi! Vedas, Puranas precepts show. 86

To parents many sons are born,
They have qualities of diverse form;
One saintly, one in penance wise,
Rich, brave or bounty in one lies;

One turns from dharma, one learning earns,
Father to each with same love turns;
But if one serves him with love deep,
Another dharma he does not keep,

That son is dear to father's heart,
Though dull he may be in all arts.
So too all souls upon the earth,
Gods, human, asuras, beasts and birds,

Of My creation they are part,
I treat them all alike in heart.
Those who from Maya, pride recede,
Serve Me in mind action and speech;

Amongst animate inanimate souls, human strong unmanly pronounced,
He is dearest unto My heart, who prays to Me with guile renounced. 87a

Kakabhusundi this is true, devotees are dearest to Me,
This in your heart construe, leave other hopes and pray to Me.' 87b So

The Lord blessed me and I was filled with highest rapture. Rama then reverted to His Childhood nature. He ran towards Mother Kaushilya sulking for food. She picked Him up in her lap and Child Rama began to feed on the milk of her breast.

The Joy for which Shiva took his awesome form, thrilled the hearts of the people of Ayodhya. 88a

Those who have experienced the rapture of that thrill for a flashing moment, even in dreams, are blessed with the fulfilment of Bramha.88 b

"O King of Birds!" Kakabhusundi continued, "I will disclose to you my personal experience:

My own experience I'll disclose,
Sans prayer to Rama cannot end woes.
Till Rama His Mercy does not show,
Glory of Rama one cannot know.

Glory sans faith cannot arise,
Without Faith, Love cannot abide;
Sans Love devotion does not stay,
Like oil in water spreads away.

Sans guru can one learn? Sans learning can detachment come?
Vedas and Puranas confirm, without devotion Peace evades. 89a So
Can heart with Joy o'erflow, till nature contented becomes?
On land can boat one row, though million means one tries in vain. 89b So

Sans contentment, desires hold sway,
As Longings grow, Peace flies away.
By praying to Rama Desires can go,
Without earth's soil, trees cannot grow.

Sans Essence, is Discernment shown?
Knowing air's realms, ether can be known.
Dharma's success on Belief's strength lies,
Like fragrance from its source doth rise.

Sans penance, is there rapture's glow?
From water's element, juices flow.
Serving saints, nature graceful holds,
Like by Fire's power a form one moulds.

Sans air's element can touch be sensed?
Sans Inner Bliss can mind have strength?

Are siddhis without Faith attained?
Sans prayer to Rama, rebirths remain.

Sans Faith devotion cannot come, Sans Devotion Rama turns not kind,
Without Rama's Mercy, e'en in dreams, Peace on the earth one cannot find. 90a
Ponder discerning Mind! renounce all disputes and all doubts,
Pray to the Lord Rama kind! Mine of Compassion, Bliss and Peace. 90b So

O Garuda! Rama has the glamour of millions of Kamas. He bears the might of millions of Durgas to vanquish all foes. His Glory exceeds that of millions of Indras. His Abode pervades the entire Universe and transcends it. His strength exceeds millions of stars. His radiance exceeds millions of Suns. His nature bears the Grace of millions of Moons. He destroys all fear on earth.

Rama is Incomparable, Rama is Rama, this truth doth in the Vedas abide,
Sun's brilliance to million glow-worms to liken is to Sun deride.
Yet learned sages in their ways, vainly Glory of Lord reveal,
He heeds their words with kindly Grace, because He loves devotee's zeal.

O Garuda! Rama is the Ocean of all Qualities. None can fathom their depth. What I have heard from sages I have repeated to you." 92

Hearing the words of Kakabhusundi, Garuda was filled with highest rapture and his heart was pervaded with the Glory of Rama.

In ignorance one conceives as real that which is unreal. Even like one sailing on a boat thinks he is at rest and the world moves by. Or like a child who, after taking turns in a circle, finds the world swirling round him when he stands still. Even as they question one another, lost in delusions created by themselves, so also an ignorant one, succumbing to Maya, is assailed by doubts and blames Divinity for his own failures.

3. KAKABHUSUNDI NARRATES VICES OF KALIYUGA

"O enlightened Kakabhusundi! " said Garuda, "coming to your ashram my doubts have been dispelled. Tell me, O wise one, why do you abide in form of a crow?"

"O king of birds", said Kakabhusundi, "I gained eternal devotion of Rama in this form. Therefore, O brother, I love this form and keep it.

That which serves one's selfish ends, one loves most. A silkworm is loved because it gives silk. For a jiva, the most selfish end is to attain devotion in the Feet of the Lord in mind action and speech. That body is pure and beautiful which enables devotion of the Lord to be attained. Even

if a body is as dazzling as Brahma's, but is bereft of devotion, it should be shunned by the righteous. 95

In the form of a crow I was blessed with eternal devotion. It is therefore the dearest form for me. The Lord has granted me life as long as I please and liberation thereafter. But I forsake not this body because prayer and devotion are possible only when the jiva is contained in a body.

Listen, O king of birds to the story of my previous births. Long long ago, when Kaliyuga had first enmeshed the world in vice, I was born a Shudra. Those were terrible days. Men and women were steeped in sin. All human beings lived in complete disregard of Vedas. Saints were spurious and made religion a means of livelihood. Rulers thrived on riches of their subjects instead of protecting them. All did what they liked. Those who boasted were considered wise. Those who spoke mere empty words were considered saints. Those who misappropriated others' wealth were considered capable. The arrogant were considered learned and those who ridiculed others and spoke lies were considered intelligent.

The wicked were considered cultured. Those who grew their hair and nails long considered renunciants. One who ate anything that came his way and wore soiled clothes was considered a yogi. Such men were worshipped in Kaliyuga. 98a

Those insulting others were considered social. Those whose mind, actions and speech were engaged in vice were considered gifted. All men were overwhelmed by women and were steeped in lust, greed and anger. Women renounced their husbands and lived with other men. Married women cared not for ornaments but widows adorned themselves to entice men. Teachers and pupils were like the blind and deaf; teachers not caring to see faults of their pupils whilst pupils hearkened not to their teachers. Parents gave advice to their sons on ways of earning livelihood and not on ways of righteousness.

Though men and women talked of ethics, they renounced their gurus and saints for little wealth. Those living in sin with others' wives, cunning in wiles and engrossed in attachments were admired as heroes. Living in wickedness themselves, people could not tolerate those who sought to live righteously. 99

Kols, bhils and others shaved their heads and posed as ascetics. Those ignorant of the Scriptures preached and discoursed from seats of the learned.

All men and women renounced the limits of their castes. They lived in sin and leaving the path of devotion, enunciated their own courses, impelled by their own selfish ends. 100

Men turned out wives from their homes and lived with women of vice. Sons heeded parents only as long as they were unmarried and thereafter

they spurned their families.

In Kaliyuga, guile, persecution, pride, strife, unholy acts, attachments, passions and vainglory pervaded the Universe. 101a

People performed yajnas, fasted and gave charity only for selfish ends. Rainfall became scarce and crops failed to yield grains. 101b

Women adorned only their hair and hungered with lust. They were filled with woes of passion, and seeking pleasures, turned away from dharma. Men became infirm and ceased to live a full span of life. They were desperate and dishonoured even sisters and daughters. None could control their senses.

O Garuda! Kaliyuga became the abode of sins and vice! But there is also a great quality in Kaliyuga by which men are freed from life cycles without effort. 102a

Salvation which one attains in Satyuga, Treta and Dvapar yugas by yoga, yajna and penance is attained easily in Kaliyuga by the grace of the Holy Name of Rama. 102b

Like Kaliyuga there can be no age, steadfast in Faith if one abides,
For here by songs of Rama alone, cycles of rebirth man o'er rides. 103a
Of four aspects of ways of dharma, in Kaliyuga only one is main,
Whichever way to help one finds, by helping one can welfare gain. 103b

Such were the days of Kaliyuga, O king of birds, in which I was born. Those were days in which wicked were acclaimed and the righteous were despised.

Hearken now to what Destiny had in store for me."

4. SHIVA'S CURSE ON KAKABHUSUNDI

"Born in such times" continued Kakabhusundi, "I became a victim of arrogance and vice. When I grew up I went to Ujjain where I met a saint who was attached in worship of Shiva. I served him out of guile to earn a livelihood. Finding me humble and obedient, the saint taught me Vedas and instructed me in mantras of Shiva. I often went to Shiva's temple and prayed to him.

Gradually I became reckless and arrogant till one day, when my guru came to the temple, I remained seated caring not to rise and pay respects to him. 106a

Suddenly a voice was heard in the temple. 'O foolish one! In your arrogance, you have despised your guru! Be born a snake for a thousand births to atone your wicked deed!' 106b

My guru was filled with pity at my misfortune. He sung a hymn to the Glory of Shiva and implored him to have mercy on me. 107

On my guru's request, Shiva took mercy and amended his curse. 'Since you have been devoted to me' spoke the voice in the temple again, 'you shall be blessed with devotion to Rama.' Thus while you take birth in different forms, you shall have love for Rama in your heart and shall be blessed by him!

I bowed to Lord Shiva within my heart for the mercy he had bestowed upon me.

Hearken now to what followed."

5. HOW KAKABHUSUNDI BECAME A CROW

"I was first born a snake in the Vindhyachal mountains," said Kakabhusundi. "Thereafter I took birth in various forms and by the grace of Shiva, my devotion for Rama increased. In whichever form I was born, I was filled with remorse for having been disrespectful to my guru.

Ultimately I was born a Brahmin. Even in my childhood, when I played with other small boys, I was engrossed in devotion of the Lord. My parents desired that I should learn the Vedas but my heart was entirely engrossed in devotion of Lord Rama.

After the death of my parents, I fared into forests. I went to many ashrams and sought sages to relate to me the glorious deeds of Rama. But wherever I went, sages told me that God was All-Pervading and Formless. This Absolute Formless Divinity did not appeal to me and I continued to yearn for the Lord. I was freed of the three desires of progeny, wealth and fame, but continued to yearn with anguish in my heart for beholding the Lotus Feet of the Lord.

I then reached Mount Sumera where I found the great sage Lomesha absorbed in meditation. After some time I bowed to the sage and said: "O merciful one! You are all knowing and learned. Narrate to me the deeds of Rama! 110

O king of birds! For sometime the great sage narrated the deeds of Rama with his face lit with pleasure. Then, judging me to be deserving of receiving knowledge of the Absolute, he preached to me that Divinity was Unborn, without attributes and Infinite; God was desireless, without name or form, Incomparable and known only in the conscience.

I became impatient and begged him to preach to me the Glory of the God of Attributes, the wondrous form of Lord Rama. 'Take mercy on me, great sage' I said, 'and unfold to me the way in which I may behold the Glory of His dazzling Form!'

The sage again related briefly the deeds of Rama and then reverted again to explain at length the concept of the Absolute. In my impatience I argued with him and the sage's wrath was roused against me as he

heatedly defended his own convictions.

I was amazed at his anger. 'Could narration of the deeds of the gracious Rama ever lead to sin! ' I mused within myself.

While I thus became inattentive the sage flew into a rage. 'O foolish one' he fumed, 'I give you knowledge of the highest, yet you heed not and repeat your own words like a crow! Begone then, and may you turn into a crow!'

I bowed to the sage and received his curse with pleasure and without fear and remorse. I was immediately changed into a crow. 112

Thereafter, seeing the fortitude with which I accepted his curse, the sage was amazed and wondered at my deep devotion. So moved was he that he called me near and was completely changed himself, regretting the rashness with which he had cursed me.

Gradually he chanted the Name of Lord Rama and narrated His beautiful Glorious Deeds at great length. He then blessed me for my yearning for the Lord.

I was then graced with a vision of the Merciful Lord Rama, who in His Benign Eternal Bounty granted me His deepest devotion while I chose to live and His Eternal Abode thereafter.

And so it is, O king of Birds, that I continue to live in the form of a crow, spending my days in ecstasy, praying to Lord Rama and recounting His Glorious Deeds again and again. Indeed in praying to the Lord, I find such peace that I do not even think of shedding this form and seeking Eternal Abode of the Lord, which he had granted me in His Infinite Mercy."

Hearing Kakabhusundi's words, glowing with devotion of Rama, the king of birds spoke in ecstasy: "Listening to thy devoted speech, new faith in Rama's Lotus Feet is born within my heart. Never can I repay thee for thy kindness in dispelling my doubts. I bow to thee, noble Kakabhusundi!"

With deep abiding love for Rama in his heart, Garuda then left for Brahma's Abode.

6. HAIL TO THE GLORIOUS DEEDS OF RAMA

"Thus, O Parvati" said Shiva, "were the doubts of Garuda removed. O Girija! there is nothing so profitable as the company of saints. But, as the Vedas say, such company can only be attained by Rama's Benign Mercy. 127

I have related to you the purest deeds of Rama. As one listens to these glorious deeds, all woes are ended and devotion in Rama's Lotus Feet pervades one's consciousness.

The fruit of all disciplines enjoined by Vedas, O Bhawani, is devotion to Rama. Those who have faith in the glorious deeds of Rama attain this

devotion without other efforts. Blessed indeed is a family in which a devotee of Lord Rama is born! 128

Thus I have narrated to you the wondrous dazzling deeds of Rama."

Parvati was filled with delight hearing Shiva's words of ecstasy. In a gentle voice, full of deepest love, she softly spoke: "By the grace of my lord, my doubts are removed and I have now steadfast faith in the Glory of Lord Rama." 129

"Thus", said Yajnavalkya, the great muni to sage Bharadwaj, "I have related to you the engrossing conversation between Shiva and Parvati, in which Shankara narrated the earthly deeds of Rama. Peace emanates from devoted listening to this sacred dialogue that ends all sorrows and doubts. This conversation between Lord Shiva and Parvati, containing the benign deeds of the Incarnated God, is the delight of saints and sages and is dear unto the hearts of devotees of the Lord."

Says Tulsi, in Kaliyuga profane
Yajna, fasting, penance all is vain.
For ever hearken to Rama's deeds,
Rama's glory sing, in heart Rama heed.

Vedas, Puranas say the Gracious Rama,
To shelter forlorn raised His arm.
Leave wiles and pray to Rama, O mind!
Who did not Bliss in His Name find?

O foolish mind, who did not find, salvation in Rama's Holy Name,
Pingla, Ajamil, other vile, by Rama's Mercy holy became.
The lowliest ones, demons, kirats, who dwelt in vice and evil deeds,
Became pure calling once on Rama, such Benign noble Rama I greet!
These glorious deeds of Raghu's Lord, those mortals who do hear or sing,
Their minds are cleaned of Kaliyuga's sins, their souls to Rama's Abode they bring.
Even five verses of Rama's deeds, with faith who bear within their heart,
From five delusions they are saved, their sorrows Rama from them does part.
All knowing gentle Gracious Rama, Who on abandoned love does bear.
Selfless and as Benign as Rama, Who other grants such loving care!
By smallest part of Whose Mercy, Tulsi unlettered, humble, meek,
Attained the highest peace in heart, save Rama such a Lord can one seek?
O Raghu's Lord! none poor like me, none great like you Mercy to take. 130a
Consider this O Gracious Lord, redeem me from birth cycles fate.
Like lustful for a woman pine, like wealth is dear to one of greed,
So may I be in Thy love lost, O Gracious Rama I hail Thy Feet! 130b

The *Ramayana* that the great Lord Shiva narrated for attainment of eternal devotion in the Lotus Feet of Rama, Tulsi has thus recounted to illuminate the darkness of his own consciousness,

The *Ramacharitmanasa* is the redeemer of sins. It is for ever the abode of welfare; the bestower of devotion and knowledge.

The *Ramacharitmanasa* destroys attachments and illusions of Maya because it is adorned by the Holy Name of Rama.

It contains within it, gentle waters of Love. Those who live in it, seeking the cool waters, within its depths, save themselves from the hot rays of worldly turmoils.

Thus ends Uttara Kanda
(The Book of the North)
The seventh book of
Ramacharitmanasa
which destroys all sins of Kaliyuga.

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GLOSSARY

Adishesha: The primordial serpent king; variously termed as 'thousand fanged', 'thousand headed'. Formed the couch for Vishnu when he reclined upon the ocean. Provided the rope for churning of the ocean. Lakshmana is regarded as the incarnation of Shesha.

Aditi: Mother of gods who gave birth to 33 gods comprising 12 Adityas, 8 Vasus, 11 Rudras and 2 Ashwinikumars. As a result of the austerities she performed, the Lord gave her the boon that He would be incarnated as her son whenever He was pleased to take a form. In Tretayuga she was Vishnu's mother in the Vaman form. Later she became mother of Rama as Kaushilya, wife of King Dashratha.

Adhyatma Ramayana: The author of the *Adhyatma Ramayana* is considered to be Vyasa. The book is also considered to be part of *Brahmanda Purana.* The *Adhyatma Ramayana* comprise seven books and contains 4200 verses.

Advaita: Non-duality; the monist interpretation of Vedanta propounded by Shankaracharya. A school of Vedanta philosophy teaching the Oneness of God, soul and universe.

Agastya: Said to have been born in a pitcher out of Varuna's infatuation for the nymph Urvasi. As he was very small when he was born, less than a span in length, he was called 'Nana'. He became a learned sage and composed a number of the hymns of the Rigveda. He was the first preacher to have visited the South Indian Peninsula.

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita visited the ashram of sage Agastya during their sojourn in the woods. The sage gave Vishnu's bow to Rama. It is said that when Rama returned to Ayodhya after completing the period of his exile, Agastya accompanied his to witness his coronation.

Ahalya: Daughter of Brahma: married to sage Gautam. Indra, infatuated by her beauty, assumed the form of sage Gautam and approached Ahalya when her husband had gone out of their ashram to offer prayers. Ahalya was tempted by cravings of her flesh. As Indra returned after fulfilment of his lust, he met Gautam coming back to his ashram. Knowing his evil deed, the sage cursed Indra with impotence and turned his wife into stone to await redemption by the Lord Himself. She was granted Mercy by Rama during his journey from Vishwamitra's ashram to Mithila.

Ajamil: A Brahmin of Kannauj who led a most dissolute and evil life. He named the youngest of his ten sons, whom he had by a prostitute, as Narayana. At the moment of his death, he called out to his youngest son by name. Thus by merely taking the name of 'Narayana' he attained salvation.

Ayodhya: Literally 'which cannot be subdued by war'. Capital of the kingdom of King Dashratha and birthplace of Rama. Situated on the banks of river Saryu. The city was built by Manu, a Prajapati and celebrated ruler of the Solar dynasty.

Ayodhya Kanda: The second book of the *Ramayana,* so named because most of the actions described therein took place in Ayodhya. The main events described in the book are: Dashratha's decision to coronate Rama as King of Ayodhya; banishment of Rama; death of king Dashratha; Bharat's refusal to accept the crown of Ayodhya and his meeting with Rama in Chitrakoot.

Akampan: Literally 'he who trembles not'. Akampan was one of the mightiest warriors of the demon army. When Vajradanshtra, one of the brave commanders of the demon army had been slain by Angad in the war of Lanka, Ravana ordered Prahasta, his chief commander, to send Akampan to destroy the vanars. In the terrible battle which followed. Akampan was killed by Hanuman.

Akshaykumar: Literally 'the indestructible prince'. Son of Ravana and a mighty demon warrior. He rode a magnificent chariot which he had obtained by severe penances. It was covered with a net of strong dazzling metal which made it impregnable. The chariot contained a complete array of weapons and deadly missiles. Akshaykumar was sent by Ravana to vanquish Hanuman after the vanar hero had slain five commanders of the demon army. Hanuman slew Akshaykumar after a grim battle between the two warriors.

Allahabad: See 'Prayag'.

Ambrisha: A devout worshipper of Vishnu. He was however cursed by sage Durvasa to undergo ten births before he could attain salvation. Durvasa also created Vritya, a demoness, to devour the king. To rescue his devotees, Vishnu sped his discus to slay the demoness and thereafter to pursue Durvasa. The sage fled through the three worlds but none would give him shelter. He therefore besought Ambrisha himself who prayed to Vishnu to grant Mercy to the sage. Vishnu acceded to his devotee's request and also took the curse of the sage upon himself. This incident is sometimes quoted as the reason for the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

Anantananda: Guru of saint Narharyananda who took Tulsidas under his care and brought him up after the death of Tulsi's mother Hulsi and

foster mother Chunniya. It is said that saint Anantananda appeared to saint Narharyananda in a dream and commanded him to seek out Tulsi and be his guru.

Angad: Son of Bali, the vanar king of Kishkindha. After Bali had been slain by Rama for driving away his brother Sugriva and keeping his wife, the kingdom of Kishkindha was bestowed to Sugriva but Angad was proclaimed Crown Prince of the kingdom.

Anjani: Beautiful queen of King Kesari who dwelt on Mount Sumera. Mother of Hanuman by the god of Wind.

Ankush: An iron hook with a sharply pointed end. Used by the driver of an elephant to keep the animal in control by driving the sharp point into the skin of the elephant's forehead which is a sensitive part of his body.

Anusuya: Literally meaning 'charity'. One of the twenty-four daughters of Daksha. Married to sage Atri. She is said to have performed severe penances and created the river Mandakini by her miraculous powers, thus tiding over a ten year drought in the area. Anusuya delivered the famous discourse on faithful wives to Sita as narrated in the *Ramayana* when Sita visited her with Rama during their banishment.

Aparna: Literally 'who would not take a leaf'. A name given to Parvati, consort of Shiva, in recognition of her severe penance to attain Shiva's hand in marriage for which she fasted completely, not even taking leaves of the bel tree for sustenance.

Apsara: Celestial nymph, literally meaning 'moving in water'. Apsaras are said to have been born when the ocean was churned and they took abode in Indra's heaven. They are classified as daivika or divine, and *laukika* or earthly. The former are ten in number and the latter thirty-four. Celebrated amongst the apsaras are Urvasi, Menaka and Rambha.

Aranya Kanda: meaning 'The Book of Forests' is the third book of the *Ramayana.* It is so called because it describes Rama's deeds in the forests during his banishment from Ayodhya. The main incidents described in the book are: Rama's visits to various sages; disfiguring of Surpnakha by Lakshmana; the battle against demons in the Dandaka woods; kidnapping of Sita by Ravana; and Rama's journey to Pampa.

Arimardan: Younger son of Satyaketu, king of Kekaya. Brother of Partapbhanu. In a feast hosted to brahmins by King Pratapbhanu, one of the kings defeated by him, offered to prepare the food and mixed flesh in the dishes served to the brahmins. They cursed the brothers with destruction and soon after all defeated kings rose in revolt. Arimardan was killed and was later born as Kumbhakarana, brother of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka.

Arundhati: Wife of sage Vashist.

Ashoka: An evergreen tree with ornamental leaves (*Saraca indica*).

Literally 'redeemer of sorrows'. Sita was held captive by Ravana under an ashoka tree in the gardens of his palace in Lanka.

Ashram: (i) A hermitage. Abode of sages in woods, mountains or other secluded places. Saints from far and wide often assembled at ashrams for religious discourses or performance of yajnas. Amongst the famous ashrams mentioned in the Ramacharitmanasa of Tulsidas are those of Bharadwaj, Vishwamitra, Agastya and Atri.

(ii) Ashram is also referred to as a stage in the life of a human being classified in four phases: bramhacharya, student and celibate; *grihastha,* householder; *vanasprastha,* anchorite; and *bhikshu,* recluse.

Ashwinikumars: Literally 'horse men'. Ashwinikumars were twin sons of a nymph by sun god. The nymph is said to have concealed herself in the form of a mare, hence she was called Ashwini and her sons Ashwinikumars. Elsewhere they are stated to be sons of Aditi and Kashyap. The Ashwinikumars were the physicians of heavens. They are depicted as riding a golden chariot drawn by horses. They are the harbingers of dawn and are personified as twilight. Their attributes relate to beauty, light and creative powers.

Asura: An enemy of the gods. A general term used for all enemies of gods including Daityas and Danavas descended from Kashyap and Diti, one of the daughters of Daksha. The Rakshas are different being descended from Pulastya. Elsewhere, Asuras are stated to have been produced by Prajapati from his groin.

Atikaya: Literally 'huge'. So named because of his immense stature. Son of Ravana by his second queen Dhanamalani. Atikaya had undergone severe penances and Brahma had granted him mastery over many weapons and boon of invincibility against gods and asuras. Brahma had also bestowed upon him an impregnable chariot. Atikaya was a mighty warrior who had successfully confronted Varuna and Indra's thunderbolt. He was sent into battle in the war of Lanka when a number of gallant warriors of the demon army had been vanquished by the vanars. Atikaya was killed by Lakshmana after a grim encounter.

Atmaram Dubey: Father of Tulsidas.

Atri: A celebrated sage and one of the Prajapatis. Husband of Anusuiya. Assigned a place in the constellation of the Great Bear as one of its stars.

Avadh: The ancient kingdom of Ayodhya lying in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh. Its capital Ayodhya is on the banks of river Saryu.

Avadhi: The local dialect of Hindi in which Tulsi composed many of his literary works, the main work being *Ramacharitmanasa.*

Avatar: A manifestation of God in the world in which He shows Himself as divine. Born not by karma, nor by any compulsion but of His own free Will and Pleasure for protection of evil when vice gains prepon-

derance over virtue. Vishnu is the source of all *avatars* or incarnations. Though God manifests Himself in the form of an incarnation of His own Pleasure, He does not come forth without a call from the earth; God is regarded to have incarnated Himself as avatars on nine occasions and the tenth *avatar* is yet to come. The first four *avatars*; the Matsya or fish; Kurma or tortoise; Varaha or boar; and the Nar-singh or Man-lion came in the Satyayuga. The next three *avatars*: Vamana or dwarf: Parashurama; and Rama came in Tretayuga. Two *avatars*: those of Krishna and Buddha followed in Dwaparyuga. The tenth, Kalki *avatar*, is to come to proclaim the end of Kaliyuga. The first three *avatars:* fish, tortoise and boar, were in the form of animals. These *avatars* came in the early Silurian age and the years in the dim past that followed, in the Lemurian continent of India. Life in these far off ages was typified by evolution from the fish age through the amphibian revolution to the mammalian age. The fourth *avatar:* the Man-lion, came when human life was in a stage of evolution. The fifth *avatar*, the dwarf, came when man had begun to evolve as human beings of today. The next four *avatars*: Parashurama, Rama, Krishna and Buddha were in the form of human beings.

Bali: (i) Son of Rikshiraj of Kishkindha was married to Tara. Bali was a great warrior and he had earned many boons from gods. He was ultimately slain by Rama for having abducted Sugriva's wife.
(ii) A Daitya king, son of Virochana and grandson of Prahlad. Married Vindhyavati. He was a good and virtuous king and he extended his empire till he held dominion over three worlds and even defeated Indra.

Bala Kanda: The first book of the *Ramayana.* So called because in it are described the childhood of Rama and events upto his marriage with Sita.

Bargad: The banyan or fig tree *(fiscus bengalensis).* A shady tree of very long life. Lord Shiva, Buddha and many sages and rishis sat under the tree for meditation. Its sap is used by ascetics for matting their hair.

Bhagirath: Son of King Dalip and descendent of King Sagar of the Solar race, the line of descent being: Sagar—Asmanjas—Anshuman—Dalip—Bhagirath. King Sagar once performed the Ashwamedh yajna and asked his sons to guard the ceremonial horse. Indra carried away the horse and bound it in Kapil muni's ashram. Sagar sent his sons to search the horse and they ultimately found it in the muni's ashram. The sons and the sage quarrelled; thereupon Kapil burnt them to ashes. King Sagar was grief-stricken when his sons did not return and sent his grandson Anshuman to look for them. He found their ashes in Kapil's ashram. Garuda advised him to bring Ganga from the heavens to the earth and its waters would restore his father and uncles to life. Sagar

undertook penances to beseech Ganga to come to the earth but he did not succeed in his efforts. Neither did his grandson Anshuman, nor Anshuman's son Dalip, Ultimately Bhagirath, son of Dalip, undertook severe penances and Brahma asked him to seek a boon. Bhagirath asked for Ganga to be brought to earth to restore his ancestors to life. His boon was granted but before Ganga could come to earth Bhagirath had to undergo further austerities to request Shiva to bear Ganga's torrent upon his head.

Bharadwaj: Son of Brihaspati, guru of the gods. He was a revered saint and was known as 'Maharshi'. Dwelt in an ashram near Prayag. When Rama was banished from Ayodhya he visited the muni in his ashram and stayed overnight as his guest.

Bharat: Son of Dashratha and Kaikeyi. Married to Mandavi, daughter of Kushdwaj, brother of King Janaka of Mithila.

Bharatkoop: A well near Chitrakoot in which Bharat consigned waters from all pilgrimages brought by him to Chitrakoot for anointing Rama King of Ayodhya.

Bhavani: One of the names of Parvati, consort of Shiva.

Bhil(-ni): An aboriginal tribe living in the Vindhyas, north of Narbada river. Renowned for their skill in the bowman's art.

Bhrigu: Founder of the lineage in which Parashurama was born. Once in doubt as to who amongst Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu was greatest, Bhrigu went to each to put the matter to test. He first went to Brahma's court and did not pay him obeisance, thus incurring his displeasure. Next he went to Shiva and treated him with disrespect due to which he was admonished by him. Finally he went to Vishnu who was resting in the heavens with Lakshmi, his spouse. Bhrigu struck Vishnu roughly in the chest with his foot to wake him. Vishnu woke suddenly but seeing the saint, gently stroked his foot with his hands enquiring gently if he had been hurt striking his foot against him. Thus Bhrigu learnt that magnanimity and mercy are the highest attributes of godliness.

Blind Sage's Curse: See 'Sravan'.

Brahma: The Ultimate Principle or Reality of the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta. Brahma is envisaged as the Supreme Soul of the Universe, Self-existence, Absolute and Eternal; from which all things emanate and to which all return. This Divine Concept is Unborn, Uncreated, without beginning and without end. Brahma is the Object of meditation realised by disciplines and equated by Tulsi with the Nirguna form of Rama. Brahma is also the first member of the Triad, the other two being Shiva and Vishnu. Manifested as the creator of the Universe, the Supreme first Cause, the Lord and Prajapati of all

creation. Brahma creates the world which remains unaltered for one day and night of Brahma which corresponds to 2,000 Mahayugas or 8640 million years. Thereafter all is destroyed and the next 'day' Brahma restores creation. In Tulsi's *Ramayana,* Brahma in the form of the Trinity, invokes The Supreme Being, to incarnate Himself in the form of Rama.

Brihaspati: Guru of the gods.

Budh: Son of Soma by Tara wife of Brihaspati. The intrigue of Soma with Tara was the cause of gods and asuras fighting each other. Brahma then compelled Soma to give up Tara. When she returned to Brihaspati, Budh was born to her. Both Soma and Brihaspati claimed the beautiful child. When Brahma commanded Tara to disclose the child's parentage, she declared Soma to be his father.

Chaitanya: Inner consciousness.

Chakor(-i): The rock or sand partridge (*Caccabis chukor*). According to traditional Hindu poetry, the bird subsists only on nectar it derives from moonbeams.

Chakwa(-i): Swan or brahmani duck. Traditionally represented as doomed for ever to nocturnal separation from its mate. The chakwa and chakwi are said to pass the night on opposite banks of a river, vainly calling to each other to cross.

Champa: *(Michelia champaca)* A beautiful sweet scented golden yellow flower.

Chatak(-i): The pied crested cuckoo. The papiha *(Cuculus melanoleucos).* According to traditional Indian fable, the bird is supposed never to drink water except such drops of rain as fall in the month of October during full moon, such occurrence of rain being very rare. For this fabulous quality, the bird is considered symbolic of deep devotion.

Chintamani: A wishing gem of the gods. A fabulous gem which is said to grant whatever its owner wants.

Chitraketu: King Chitraketu is said to have had ten million wives but no son. Blessed by Rishi Angira a son was born to him. When the child was a year old, his step-mothers poisoned him. The king was distraught with grief. Narada summoned the boy's spirit to allay the king's grief. The child disclosed the story of his previous birth when he was a king. He had gone into the woods for meditation where a woman gave him a fruit which he roasted before eating . The fruit had millions of ants in it which were burnt to death. The ants were born as his stepmothers, the queen who bore him was the woman who had given him the fruit. When Chitraketu heard the story he renounced his life.

Chitrakoot: Literally 'bright peak'. The sacred hill of Chitrakoot is one of a small group that forms the last spur of the great Vindhyan Ranges.

Chuniya: Maid of Hulsi, mother of Tulsi. She was foster mother for Tulsi on the death of his mother soon after his birth. Chuniya died of snake bite when Tulsi was about five and a half years old.

Churning of the Brine (Ocean): The Lord Incarnated Himself as the Tortoise to assist the gods when they sought to churn the ocean, providing Himself as the pivot.

Dadhicha: Son of Atharvan. A Vedic saint who practised penance in the Naimisha woods. When Indra and the gods were oppressed by Vritra, a formidable demon, Vishnu advised them to request Dadhicha to give them his bones. Weapons made out of his bones would slay the demon. When gods approached Dadhicha, he gave his life so that the gods may take his bones. Dadhicha had been taught certain sciences by Indra but the god had threatened to cut off his head if he disclosed them to anyone. The Asuras however prevailed upon him to communicate his knowledge. Indra came to cut off his head, but just then the Ashwinis came to his rescue and gave him a horse's head which Indra had cut off. His own head was restored later.

Dadhimukh: Chief guardian of the Madhu woods (honey forest). A mighty vanar warrior who challenged Hanuman and Angad when they devastated the Madhu woods in reckless gaiety after having accomplished their mission of searching Sita. Dadimukh later accompanied Rama to Lanka with the vanar armies.

Daitya: Descendants of Diti, a daughter of Daksha, and Kashyap. Daityas controlled the oceans and the earth. They were a race of giants who warred with the gods and opposed them. Hiranyakashipu was one of the famous Daityas mentioned in the *Ramayana.*

Daksha: Father of Sati, who was consort of Shiva. Daksha was one of the Prajapatis.

Danava: Descendants of Danu, a daughter of Daksha and Kashyapa.

Danda: Punishment. Also, 'a stick'. Tulsi, in his inimitable style, use the two meanings of the world skilfully in his description of Rama Rajya.

Dandaka: Forests lying between the Narbada and Godavari rivers.

Dashratha: Literally 'ten chariots'. King of Ayodhya; son of King Aj. Father of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharat and Satrughan. Descendant of the Solar dynasty also known as the dynasty of Ikshwaku after the sixth descendant from Brahma from whom the family originated.

Daya: Mercy.

Devantak: Literally 'Slayer of gods'. Son of Ravana. In a grim battle in which the demon heroes fought bravely against vanar warriors. Devantak was killed by Hanuman.

Dhak: (*Butea fondosa*). A hardy tree which grows on barren land. It sheds its leaves in spring and deep red flowers blossom upon its bare

branches.

Dhanusha: Bow.

Dharma: Divinely established law of universe; the condition of righteousness. The term is applied to various aspects of moral and spiritual values, the faithful observance of which are enjoined by dharma. Often used synonymously with religion and religious disciplines.

Dharmaruchi: Minister of Pratapbhanu. Due to curse of brahmins who had been served food in which human flesh was mixed, Pratapbhanu was born as Ravana and Dharmaruchi, his minister, as Vibhishana.

Dhruva: Son of King Uttanapad and Suniti. The king had two queens Suniti and Suruchi. Dhruva was son of the elder queen. The younger queen was however the king's favourite and she had a son named Uttam. Once Uttam was playing with the king and Dhruva wanted to join him. The younger queen held him back saying that he would have merited honour of playing in the king's lap if he had been born of her womb. Dhruva was so pained at the nature of human affections that he renounced the world and when he was older he went to the forests. For his deep devotion he was raised to the heavens where he was assigned the honour of being placed as the Pole star.

Diggaj: Elephants who protect the eight cardinal points of the compass. (i) Airavata, (ii) Pundarika, (iii) Mahapadma, (iv) Kumud, (v) Anjana, (vi) Pushpadanta, (vii) Sarvabhauma, (viii) Supralika.

Digpal: Guardians of the eight portions of the earth: Indra of the East; Agni of South-East; Yama of the South; Nirriti or Surya of South-West; Varuna of the West; Vayu or Maruta of North-West; Kuvera of the North; Isana or Soma of North-East.

Diti: Daughter of Daksha. One of the wives of Kashyap. Mother of Daityas. Also mother of Maruts who were struck by Indra's thunderbolt while still in their mother's womb, thereby divided into forty-nine individual.

Dundubhi: An asura who lived in the form of a bull. He was arrogant of his might and sought to establish his supremacy. He first challenged the ocean. The sea god advised him to seek strife with the Himalayas. Himanchal told him that his abode was only to provide place for meditation and suggested that he should challenge Bali. Accordingly Dundubhi went to Bali who was also an enemy of his brother Maiavi, and challenged him to a duel. He was slain by the vanar warrior and Bali threw away his carcass. Due to a drop of blood falling in the ashram of sage Matang, Bali was cursed with destruction by the sage if he dared to venture to the Rishyamuk hills.

Durga: One of the names of goddess Parvati, consort of Shiva. She is invoked under this name as World Mother.

Durmukha: Literally 'terrible faced'. One of the formidable warriors of the demon armies. He gave a stirring speech in Ravana's court advising Ravana to meet the challenge thrown by Rama and avenge the ignominy of Lanka's destruction at the hands of Hanuman.

Durvasa: Son of sage Atri and Anusuiya. An irascible sage who had great learning but was impetuous and quick in pronouncing curse.

Dushana: Commander of the army of Khara, brother of Surpnakha. Resided in Janasthan. Killed in the Dandaka battle by Rama when Khara and Dushana attacked him after Surpnakha had been disfigured by Lakshmana.

Dwivida: One of the mighty vanar warriors. Brahma had given him a portion of nectar. Dwivida slew Shonitaksh and Ashniprabh, two gallant demon warriors in the battles of Lanka.

Earth's Daughter: Sita was manifested from the earth and is thus referred to as the 'Earth's Daughter'. In her Divine birth she had come forth out of the earth in a field that King Janaka was ploughing to perform a yajna. He saw the child of dazzling beauty and adopted her as his daughter.

Eight Means of Concentration: The eight means of concentration according to the yoga system are: yama, forbearance and restraint; niyama, religious observance; *asana,* yogic postures; *pranayama,* control of breath; *pratyahara,* restraint of senses; *dharana,* steadying of the mind; *dhyana,* concentration; *samadhi,* profound meditation.

Eight Siddhis: See 'Siddhis'.

Eighty-four Lakh Species of Life: Eight million four hundred thousand species of life on earth comprising 1,000,000 aquatic creatures; 2,700,000 creatures of the earth other than human beings; 1,000,000 types of insects; 1,000,000 kinds of birds; 2,300,000 species of quadrupeds; and 400,000 genetic types of human beings.

Five Elements: Ether, earth, water, light and air are regarded as the five elements of which all matter and earthly life is composed.

Five Kinds of Music: Classified according to types of musical instruments on which music is placed. (i) String instruments, such as sitar; wind instruments, such as trumpet; (iii) skin instruments of percussion, such as drums; (iv) brass or other metallic instruments of percussion, such as cymbals; (v) instruments of marking tal or time.

Five Senses: Also referred to as the five subtle elements. Sense of (i) touch; (ii) taste; (iii) hearing; (iv) smell; (v) sight.

Forty-nine Winds: The Winds or Maruts, sons of Diti. They were forty-nine in numbers. Indra had vanquished the Asuras who were the elder sons of Diti. She thereupon implored her husband Kashyap to give her a son who could avenge their defeat. Her wish was granted but while

she bore the child in her womb, Indra sought to destroy the child with his weapon Vajra. He could not however succeed in destroying the child the forty-nine pieces into which the child was dismembered groaned in her womb, till Indra in compassion transformed them into Maruts or winds.

Four Actions of Devotion: The four actions of devotion are classified as *seva,* service; *shraddha,* faith; *tapasya,* penance and *bhakti,* devotion.

Four Forms of Moksha: The four forms of *apavarga,* that is, final beatitude are (i) *salokya,* abiding in the same heaven as God; (ii) *sarupa,* being in the same form as God; (iii) *samipa,* being in actual contact with God; (iv.) *sayukta,* complete absorption into God.

Four Fruits of Life (Four Ideals of Life): The four fruits of life are the four rewards of good actions. (i) *kama,* pleasure; (ii) *artha,* wealth; (iii) *dharma,* religious virtues; (iv) *moksha,* salvation. The four fruits of life serve the ends of human pursuits.

Four Hindrances: The four hindrances to virtuous and righteous living are stated as (i) mental inactivity; (ii) distractions; (iii) passions; (iv) propensity to pleasure.

Four Modes of Life: The four akars or modes of birth are classified as (i) *pindija* or viviparous; (ii) *andaja* or oviparous; (iii) *swedeja* or born in sweat; (iv) *udbhija* or produced by sprouting.

Four Modes of Making War: For artifices employed in making war are classified as sowing dissension, negotiation, bribery and using force.

Four Stages of Life: The four stages of life on earth are classified as (i) *bramhacharya,* the student's celibate life; (ii) *grihastha,* the householder's life; (iii) *vanaprastha,* the hermit; (iv) *bhikshu,* or mendicant. See Ashram.

Four Stages of Soul: The soul is said to have three transient conditions: waking, dreaming, and profound dreamless sleep. The fourth state of the soul is permanent and is indistinguishable from the Supreme Spirit. When awake, the soul perceives activities of the visible and material world; while asleep it is in communion with the world of illusion; when it is in dreamless sleep it is temporarily entranced in the vastness of the Beyond; and in its final stage, it is one with the Supreme.

Four Ways of Dharma: The four ways of dharma are stated as *satya,* or truth; *pavitrata* or purity; *daya,* or mercy; and *dana,* or charity. Dharma enjoins the following four *kriyas* or ways of virtuous life; *seva* or service, *sraddha* or piety; *tapasya* or penance; and *bhakti* or faith.

Four Ways of Taking Food: Four ways of taking food are classified as: (i) *bhakhshya* or mastication; (ii) *bhojya* or deglutition; (iii) *chashiva,* or taking food by sucking; and (i) *lehya,* by lapping.

Fourteen Worlds: The first seven worlds are stated to be above the earth:

(i) Bhurlok, (ii) Bhuvalok, (iii) Swargalok, (iv) Maharlok, (v) Janalok, (vi) Tapolok, (vii) Satyalok. The remaining seven worlds are below the earth: (viii) Atal, (ix) Bital, (x) Sutal, (xi) Rasatal, (xii) Nital, (xiii) Mahatal, and (xiv) Patal.

Galava: A pupil of sage Vishwamitra. Galava requested Vishwamitra to let him know what he may offer to him for being his guru. Vishwamitra asked for 1,000 black eared horses. Galava set out on the difficult mission of finding such horses and ultimately came to know of three kings each of who possessed 200 animals of this kind. These kings however, who were childless, agreed to part with their horses only if they were blessed with children. Galava thereupon approached Yayati who had a daughter who possessed miraculous powers of providing a son for anyone she wished while she herself remained a virgin. On Galava's request she provided each of the three kings with a son. With 600 horses thus collected, Galava returned to Vishwamitra who agreed to modify his stipulation of 1,000 horses if in lieu of the remaining 400 animals, Yayati's daughter provided him also with a son. Thus Galava fulfilled his guru's commands.

Gandharvas: Gandharvas were celestial musicians. They were also skilled in medicine and prepared soma juice for the gods. They were endowed with beauty and dwelt in the skies or atmosphere.

Ganesha: Son of Shiva and Parvati. God of wisdom and remover of obstacles, hence his name Vinayaka. The name of Ganesha is taken first amongst gods when they are invoked. According to legend the gods once disputed as to which of them should be given the first place in worship. To settle the dispute Brahma proposed that they should race round the world and whoever came back first would get the honour. Ganesha started on his own steed, riding a mouse, and was naturally soon left behind. Narada met him on the way and advised him to write the word Rama on the ground and pace round it, for Rama encompassed all creation. Ganesha did so and Brahma awarded him the first place amongst the gods. Ganesha is depicted with an elephant's head. Legend has it that Parvati once went to bathe and she asked Ganesha to see that no one entered the house while she took her bath. Meanwhile Shiva arrived and Ganesha, whom Shiva had not seen till then, did not allow him to enter. Incensed against the child, Shiva hit him, striking off his head. Parvati wept for her child and Shiva went out promising to bring the first head that came his way. As it happened he encountered an elephant, and Ganesha had to be content with an elephant's head. Later Ganesha lost one tusk of his head in similar circumstances. Shiva was asleep and Parashurama came to meet him. Ganesha did not allow Parashurama to enter. This annoyed the great Parashurama and he

flashed his axe at him. Ganesha recognized the axe given by his father and, respecting its power, took it upon his tusk thus breaking away a part of his body.

Ganga: See Bhagirathi. The waters of the river Ganga are held sacred by Hindus throughout the country. Three famous pilgrimages of Haridwar, Prayag and Kashi are situated along its banks. The river Yamuna meets Ganga at Prayag. The confluence of the blue waters of the Yamuna with the clear waters of Ganga is known as Triveni—a third river Saraswati is said to intermingle with the waters at the confluence.

Garuda: Son of Kashyap muni and Vinata, one of the daughters of Daksha. Known as the King of Birds.

Gauri: Meaning 'fair'. One of the names of Parvati.

Gautama: One of the seven great rishis represented by the Great Bear Constellation.

Gavya: One of the vanar warriors who was proud of his might and had an army of seven million vanars. An ally of Rama in the war of Lanka.

Ghat: Sacred bank of a river, trained and made suitable for offering prayers and bathing. Gathering place for saints and sages during holy occasions associated with their sites.

Ghee: Clarified butter. Used as an offering in yajnas.

Godavari: A river flowing from West to East in Southern India, originating in the Western Ghats near Nasik and outfalling into the Bay of Bengal near Kakinda on the Eastern coast. Rama resided in Panchvati on the banks of the Godavari river after he had travelled southwards on leaving Chitrakoot, during his banishment.

Gomati: A tributary of the river Ganga with its source in the Himalayan foothills in Pilibhit District of Uttar Pradesh. Flows into river Ganga near Ghazipur. Gomati was the second river Rama had to cross when he proceeded on banishment, the first being Tamasa on the banks of which he had halted overnight.

Goswami: Literally 'one who has complete control over sense organs. An appellation of Tulsi's name and he is generally referred to as Goswami Tulsidas.

Guha: The chief of the forest tribe of Nishads living in the woods North of the Ganga river. Sringverpur was the capital town of his domain. Guha served Rama with unflinching zeal and became the symbol of the Lord's Compassionate Mercy upon all humanity.

Guru: According to Hindu tradition, spiritual knowledge in order to be effective, must be transmitted from a teacher to a pupil. Even incarnations such as Krishna, Buddha and Rama accepted human teachers to guide them in their spiritual disciplines. The teacher is known as the guru. Religious books can give information but cannot give inspiration

to lead to Divine Experience, and religion if not so transmitted, merely becomes an intellectual sermon. High perfection is expected of a guru who is considered free from worldly motives. He is more revered to a pupil than his earthly father.

Hansa: Swan. Referred to as possessing the quality of being able to separate milk from water. Compared to in religious poetry as the soul enveloped in Maya. The gliding movement of the swan on water is also compared with the graceful gait of a woman.

Hanuman: Son of God of Wind and Anjani, wife of Kesari. Legend has it that Anjani once put the child in a cave and went to gather fruit in the woods. She cautioned the child not to eat anything other than ripe red fruit. There was a solar eclipse that day and as the sun rose in the sky Hanuman mistook the glowing red ball to be a fruit and leapt towards it. Rahu who, according to legend, pursues the sun in an eclipse, complained to Indra who threw his thunderbolt at the child. It struck him on his chin and the child fainted. When the Wind god heard of the incident, he withdrew into a cave in his wrath. The world was sorely afflicted when the winds stopped. The gods then prayed to the Wind god and granted Hanuman invincibility against all their weapons. Because of the injury sustained by the child upon his chin, he was called 'Hanuman' (*Hanu* meaning chin.) Hanuman is known as 'messenger of Rama' and is worshipped as a god.

Harish Chandra: Son of King Trishanku of the Solar dynasty. In order to satisfy Vishwamitra, who wanted to make a trial of his integrity, he relinquished his throne and hired himself as a servant of a man who kept a burning ghat. Whenever a person brought a corpse he was required to collect a fee and deposit it with his master. One day a woman, who he recognised as his wife, came with his dead son. She had no money to pay for the use of the burning ghat. Harish Chandra would not however, allow the body of his own child to be cremated without the prescribed fees being paid. His helpless wife prepared to strip off her clothes to make them over in lieu of payment in cash. The gods interposed and, in recognition of King Harish Chandra's integrity, restored him to his throne and former prosperity.

Himanchal: The mountain kingdom of the Himalayas. Birthplace of Parvati, consort of Shiva.

Himwant: King of the mountains. To his queen Maina, was born Parvati, consort of Shiva.

Hiranyakashipu: Son of Kashypa and Diti. Father of Prahlad. Slain by Vishnu, who appeared as the Narasingha avatar, for his contempt for the Supreme Being. His queen was Kayodha and when Prahlad was in her womb, Narada propounded to her the knowledge of Divinity.

Prahlad when born was a staunch devotees of the Lord and he defied his father when he was commanded to worship him instead of the Lord.

Hulsi: Mother of Tulsi; wife of Atmaram Dubey.

Hundred Crore Verses of Rama: Of one hundred crore verses of the deeds of Rama, it is said that Shiva distributed thirty-three crores to each of the three worlds. The remaining one crore he divided into sets of thirty-three lakhs each and disposed them off likewise. Thus he continued, dividing the remaining lakh into sets of thirty-three thousand each, the remaining thousand into sets of three hundred, till finally one sloka remained. Even this he divided into three parts consisting of three words each. The remaining word out of the ten word sloka, he kept for himself. This word was Rama the name of the Lord Himself which, Shiva said, was equal to all the hundred crore verses of Rama.

Ikshwaku: Son of Vaivaswata Manu, the Prajapati. The first king of Ayodhya and fourth in line of descent from Brahma.

Indra: God of the firmament and king of the heavens. First in the rank of god. Indra rides a bright golden car and his weapon is the thunderbolt. As deity of the atmosphere, he gives rain. Married Indrani, daughter of Pulomana the daitya. Indra is depicted as a god of sensual inclinations and he seduced Ahalya, wife of Gautama. The sage is said to have cursed Indra to be dismembered into a thousand pieces for his sin. Later he modified his curse to the effect that when Shiva's bow would be strung by Rama, Indra's thousand dismembered pieces would be transformed into a thousand eyes in his body. Thus Indra is known as 'thousand eyed'. Ravana warred against Indra, and so mighty was the demon king that he defeated the king of gods in battle. Ravana's son Meghnad bound Indra and released him only when Brahma interceded on his behalf. A well known incident concerning Indra and the Divine Incarnation in the form of Lord Krishna is Indra's rage when Krishna dissuaded the people of Vraja from worship of Indra. The god of rain sent a torrential deluge to punish the people but Krishna sheltered them by lifting Mount Govardhan so that the people could dwell below it.

Indrajit: Name given to Meghnad, son of Ravana, for his success in holding Indra captive during a battle his father fought against Indra. (See Meghnad)

Indriyas: Ten in number comprising five senses and five organs of actions. The five senses are (i) touch; (ii) taste; (iii) hearing; (iv) smell; and (v) sight. The five organs of actions are (a) speech; (b) evacuation; (c) sensual desires; (d) walking; and (e) giving.

Ishwara: The Personal God. Ishwara is endowed with such qualities as

omniscience, omnipresence, Universal lordship and unlimited power. In different aspects of the pure Brahman, Ishwara is called the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe. From the standpoint of the Pure Brahman, the universe as existing is through Maya of which Ishwara is the architect. Ishwara is associated with Saguna Brahman, who with the help of Sattya, creates; with the help of Rajas, preserves; and with the help of Tamas, destroys.

Jambwan: A brave and mighty son of Brahma. A wise and accomplished adviser of Sugriva. He went with the search party sent southwards to bring news of Sita. Jambwan had grown old in age when he was sent with the party but even then he assessed his capacity of leaping over the ocean to the extent of ninety *yojans*. This was however short by then yojanas to enable him to cross the hundred *yojan* stretch of the ocean.

Janaka: King of the ancient kingdom of Mithila. Son of King Hyasvaroma and elder brother of Kishdhwaj. Descendant of King Nim founder of the dynasty of Mithila. Married to Sunaina. Sita and Urmilla were his daughters. King Janaka was famed for his deep learning and righteousness. King Sudhanva of Sankashya waged war against Janaka for Shiva's bow and Sita's hand in marriage. Sudhanva was slain by King Janaka and his kingdom of Sankashya was given by Janaka to his younger brother Kushdhwaj.

Jatayu: The vulture king. Son of Garuda; grandson of Vinita and brother of Sampati. Both brothers gave valuable assistance in providing clues to Sita's whereabouts.

Jayanta: Son of Indra and Indrani. Showed disrespect to Sita by assuming form of a crow and pecking at her feet while Rama adorned his beloved with flowers in the woods of Chitrakoot.

Jiva: The individual living soul. Dwelling in a body, in association with Maya, pure consciousness in made to forget its true nature and is controlled by Maya.

Jnana: Literally 'knowledge'. In religious terminology it is taken to mean 'knowledge of ultimate Reality'. According to Vedanta philosophy. Brahman, which is One and without a second is Real and the only substance. Jnana is one of the three broad spiritual disciplines for the attainment of salvation: Jnana yoga, Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga.

Kabandh: Literally: 'headless trunk'. Son of the goddess Sri, he is said to have been a handsome Grandharva youth named Dhanu, who as a reward for penances obtained the boon of long life. Once he was singing in Indra's court where Durvasa was also present but was inattentive of the Gandharva's music. Dhanu thereupon made fun of the sage who cursed him to become a demon. Thus transformed, he grew vain of his might and turned to attack Indra. The king of gods launched his

thunderbolt at him which drove his head into his body. To keep him from starving, his hands were lengthened and a mouth provided in his belly. He is described as 'covered with hair; vast as a mountain; without head or neck; having a mouth with immense teeth in the middle of his belly; and one eye on his breast'. The monster demon was slain by Rama in the woods while the two brothers searched for Sita.

Kadru: A daughter of Daksha and one of thirteen married to Kashyap. Mother of serpents.

Kailash: A mountain in the Himalayas north of lake Mansarovar. Abode of Lord Shiva.

Kaitab: A Daitya slain by Vishnu; younger brother of Madhu.

Kakabhusundi: Initially born a Shudra and later a Brahmin. Cursed by Lomash muni to become a crow for repeatedly speaking of the glory of Rama. The story of Kakabhusundi is related in the epilogue of Tulsi's Ramacharitmanasa as an example of highest devotion to Rama.

Kaikeyi: Daughter of Ashwapati of the kingdom of Kekay. Favourite queen of King Dashratha, but turned the course of events by asking for two boons: Rama's banishment for fourteen years on the eve of his coronation as Crown Prince of Ayodhya, and Bharat's installation as King of Ayodhya. It is said that once Kaikeyi helped and aged Rishi by offering her hand to support him as he walked. The sage granted her the boon that her hand would become as strong as steel whenever she so desired. She invoked this boon when she held Dashratha's chariot against her hand when her warrior husband was wounded in the battle of Vijaywanti. For her assistance Dashratha granted her two boons which she said she would ask for when she was in need of them.

Kaliyuga: The last of the cycles of four yugas comprising an age of the world. Kaliyuga is an age in which vice has preponderance over virtue. It consists of 1,200 years of God or 432,000 years of mankind.

Kalnemi: An uncle of Ravana. Said to have been a Gandharva in his previous birth. He was cursed by Durvasa while he sang in Indra's court to become a demon. He was to get salvation through Hanuman when he came as messenger of Rama.

Kalpa: A day and night of Brahma consisting of 8,640,000,000 years of life on earth. The measure of Time is taken as follows, lava being the time taken in batting the eyelids once:

60 lava	1 Nimesh
60 Nimesh	1 Parmanu
60 Parmanu	1 Pal
60 Pal	1 Ghari
60 Ghari	1 Day (including night)

30 Days	1 Month
12 Months	1 Year
360 Years of life on earth	1 Year of gods
12,000 Years of gods	1 Mahayuga
2,000 Mahayugas	1 Kalpa

A Mahayuga, that is 12,000 years of god, is divided into four yugas as follows:

	Satya	Treta	Dwapar	Kali	Total
Yuga	4,000	3,000	2,000	1,000	10,000
Sandhya	400	300	200	100	1,000
Sandhyasna	400	300	200	100	1,000
	4,800	3,600	2,400	1,200	12,000

Kama: Fulfilment of sensuous and asthetic desire. Kama is considered to be one of the four ideals which serve the ends of human pursuit. Kama must however be guided by dharma; otherwise it degenerates into voluptuousness.

Kama-Deva: The god of love married Rati, goddess of desire. Kama was lord of the apsaras.

Kamandal: An earthen or wooden pot with a spout used by mendicants generally for keeping water.

Kamadhenu: The cow which grants desires. She emerged from churning of the ocean.

Kamban: Born in Tiruvazhundur in the Cola country. Son of Athavan. Devotee of Nammalvar, a famous Vaishnavite saint.

Kanda: (i) A section or book. The *Ramayana* is divided into seven Kandas: Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishikindha Kanda, Sunder Kanda, Lankakand, and Uttar Kanda.
(ii) An esculent tuber root prescribed as a food for ascetics and fasting in forests.

Karma: Deeds, actions. The word is associated particularly with the accumulated effect of all actions predetermining the direction the individual soul moves from one birth to another. Also associated with the spiritual discipline of dedicating all actions towards righteousness and dharma as a means of attaining salvation.

Kartikeya: The second son of Shiva and Parvati. Also known as Skanda. Spoken of as six headed. He is regarded as god of war.

Kashi: One of the most famous pilgrimages on the banks of the river Ganga.

Kashyap: The last of the Prajapatis. Married eight of the daughters of Prajapati Daksha.

Katha: A religious discourse or recitation of the deeds of the Lord.
Kaushilya: Mother of Rama. Eldest queen of King Dashratha.
Kaushal: The kingdom of the Solar kings located along the banks of the Saryu River. Ayodhya was its capital city.
Kekaya: Ancient kingdom in the region of the Jhelum and Chenab rivers.
Kesari: One of the commanders of the vanar armies. Also a vanar king, husband of Anjani, mother of Hanuman.
Ketu: A part of Rahu the daitya metamorphosed into a heavenly body. The ninth of the planets.
Khara: Son of Kaikasi's sister. Kaikasi was mother of Ravana. Khara was one of the most gallant warriors in the demon army. He was killed by Rama when he came to wage war against him after Surpnakha had been disfigured by Lakshmana.
Kinnars: Celestial musicians, mythically represented by form of man with head of horse. Said to be dwelling in paradise of Kuvera. They are stated to have sprung from Brahma's toes.
Kirtan: Devotional songs sung in chorus. Chanting of the Name of the Lord in devotional congregations is also a form of kirtan. Enunciated as the fourth form of devotion by Rama in his discourse on devotion to Shabri.
Kishkindha: Ancient kingdom situated on river Tungbhadra. Bali was king of Kishkindha and after he was slain by Rama, Sugriva was proclaimed king and Angad Crown Prince of the kingdom.
Kishkindha Kanda: The Book of Kishkindha. The fourth book of the Ramayana, so named because the action described therein mostly took place in the kingdom of Kishkindha.
Kokil: The Indian cuckoo. (Caculus)
Kols: A forest tribe living in the eastern part of Central India.
Krishna: The eighth avatar of Vishnu. Krishna was born when Ugrasen was king of Mathura. Ugrasen was a righteous king but his son Kansa was a tyrant. Kansa was very fond of his cousin sister Devaki, daughter of Devak, brother of Ugrasen. Devaki was married to Vasudeva and Kansa drove the nuptial chariot himself. As he did so a voice was heard from the heavens: "Foolish one! the eighth son born of those who sit on the chariot shall bring about your end!" Kansa raged in fury and drew his sword to kill his sister whom he loved. It was only when Vasudeva promised to deliver to him all children born to his wife that Kansa agreed to spare her. He held Vasudeva and Devaki prisoners. Later he imprisoned his own father and usurped the throne. Kansa slew all sons born to Devaki. Vasudeva had a friend named Nanda who dwelt with his wife Yashoda in Gokul on the opposite bank of river Yamuna. Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva, went to Gokul to live with Nanda

when she was with child, to escape the fury of Kansa. When her time was full Balaram was born to Rohini. Seven children were born to Devaki and each of them was destroyed by Kansa. Thereafter the Lord Incarnated Himself as Krishna, Devaki's eighth child. Vasudeva managed to convey the child to Yashoda as soon as he was born, and brought away a baby girl who had been born to Yashoda just then. Yashoda had not known that the babies had been exchanged. But the cruel Kansa soon learnt of the birth of the eighth son of Devaki and commanded that all male children born in the last fifteen days should be slain. Mighty demons in many forms came to slay Child Krishna. The first to try was Putana. The cunning demoness took the form of a lovely dame and clasped the Divine Child to her breasts. She had applied vicious poison to her nipples to kill the babe as she fed him. Child Krishna sucked at her breasts with such force that the wicked demoness writhed in agony and was killed. Many terrible demons followed: Shakatasura, Trinavart, Vatsasura, Bakasura, Vyomasura, Arishtasura, and Keshi; but all of them failed to vanquish the Divine Child. The brave lad then drove away the terrible thousand headed serpent Kaliya from the Yamuna river making its waters safe for saints and sages to bathe.

Later he slew Kansa while the cruel king tried to have him killed by a mighty elephant and by his strong wrestlers. After Kansa had been slain, Krishna went to Avantikapuri to take lessons under sage Sandipani. For the knowledge imparted to One who was Himself the fountainhead of Knowledge, Krishna restored his guru's son to life. Krishna met Sudama as a co-pupil at his guru's ashram and they became eternal friends. Meanwhile King Jarasandh of Magadh, whose daughters were married to Kansa heard of his son-in-law's death and he invaded Mathura to avenge his death.

Yudhishthira, King of Pandvas had invited Krishna and the Kauravas to a yajna. A new meeting hall had been constructed in the Khandav woods. Duryodhan accidentally slipped into a pool of water in the meeting hall, considering it to be well polished floor. Bhima and Draupadi could not restrain their laughter and the embarrassed Duryodhana determined to avenge the insult. He sat one evening to gamble with Yudhishthira and as they played the king staked all he had including his queen Draupadi. When he lost, Duryodhan declared he would disrobe Draupadi in the assembly. None protested and Draupadi pleaded to Lord Krishna who remained invisible while he covered her with raiments as Duryodhana continued to pull her dresses away. Thus did the Lord foil Duryodhana's attempt to outrage Draupadi's modesty. King Dhritrashtra, father of Duryodhana, returned the wealth of the

Pandavas to Yudhishthira, but Duryodhana again engaged the Pandavas in gambling. The stakes were twelve years of exile and one year of life in hiding for the loser. Yudhishthira lost again and he went to the woods with the Pandavas and Draupadi. After completion of the period of exile, the Kauravas declined to return the kingdom of the Pandavas to them. Lord Krishna Himself went to Hastinapur to dissuade the Kauravas from war but his efforts failed. War was now inevitable. Both Duryodhana and Arjun sought Krishna's support. The Lord offered 140 million warriors to Duryodhana and his own unarmed assistance to Arjun. In the Mahabharat war, the Lord expounded the philosophy of life and religion to a hesitant Arjun. With Krishna's assistance, the Pandavas won. Thus did the Lord fulfil the purpose of His Divine Incarnation. He had come forth to the world to show forth a great Object of bhakti, and the love of God for His *bhakta*. He came forth to destroy opposing forces that retard evolution and overwhelm righteousness. He dwelt in the world of His creation to strengthen the decaying structure of virtuous human values.

Krittivasa: Author of the *Ramayana* in Bengali written by him towards the end of the fifteenth century.

Kshattriya: One of the four castes into which human society is divided according to Vedas. As defined in the *Bhagavadgita:* Heroism, high spirit, firmness, resourcefulness, dauntlessness in battle, generosity and sovereignty are the duties of a kshattriya.

Kumbhakarana: Son of Visrawa muni and Kaikesi daughter of Sumali. Younger brother of Ravana, demon king of Lanka. After performing severe penances, Kumbhakarana asked for the boon of continuous sleep for six months. Kumbhakarana criticised Ravana for sinning against Rama by kidnapping Sita, but remained faithful to his brother and went to face Rama in battle. He was slain by Rama after a grim encounter.

Kumud: Lily or red lotus.

Kund: The jasmine flower.

Kush: A variety of grass used in religious observances and for making mats.

Kushdhwaj: Younger brother of King Janaka of Mithila and son of King Hyasvaroma. Father of Mandwi wife of Bharat and of Srutikirti, wife of Satrughan.

Kuvera: Son of Visrawa muni and Idavida, daughter of Bharadwaj muni. Grandson of Pulastya muni. He was named Vaisrawana by his grandfather and was later called Kuvera. He engaged himself in long and severe penances which pleased Brahma and was asked to seek a boon. Kuvera requested that he may be made a guardian of the world. He was

thus given guardianship of the North. Brahma also bestowed upon him the Pushpak chariot. Visrawa gave him the kingdom of Lanka which lay abandoned by demons. Later his half brother Ravana asked him to hand over the kingdom to him and Kuvera took abode near Mount Kailash in the newly built city of Alaka.

Lakshmana: Son of King Dashratha and Queen Sumitra. Incarnation of Shesha. Accompanied Rama on his exile for fourteen years. A brave warrior whose most outstanding victory was that over Meghnad, son of Ravana, in the war of Lanka. Amongst the other mighty demons slain by him in Lanka's battles were Virupaksh and Atikaya, another son of Ravana.

Lakshmi: Consort of Vishnu. Goddess of wealth and fortune. Born of churning of the ocean, hence called Ocean's daughter. Sita was incarnation of Lakshmi.

Lanka: Ancient island kingdom of Ceylon. The kingdom was first ruled by Sumali. Malyavan and other demons who were destroyed by Vishnu. The kingdom was thereafter given to Kuvera.

Lanka Kanda: The sixth book of the *Ramacharitmanasa* of Tulsi. Tulsi named the book Lanka Kanda because most of the action described therein took place in Lanka.

Lankini: A demoness who was the embodiment of Lanka itself and was appointed by Ravana to guard the city of Lanka. None could enter the city without her permission. She challenged Hanuman when he sought to enter the city. When Hanuman insisted, she dealt him a blow and the vanar hero retaliated by hitting her back. She could not sustain the impact of Hanuman's blow and fell to the ground.

Lava: Son of Rama and Sita. Tulsi merely mentions the fact that two sons, Lava and Kusha were born to Rama and Sita. Valmiki in his *Ramayana* relates the story of the deeds of Lava and Kusha after Sita had been banished by Rama to reside in Valmiki's ashram till they were installed kings of Kaushal. Lava was installed king of North Kaushal and Kusha of the southern part of the kingdom.

Loka: The 'worlds'. There are seven lokas excluding the infernal regions: (i) Bhurlok, earth; (ii) Bhuvarloka, space between earth and son, abode of sages and munis; (iii) Swarloka, heaven of Indra between Sun and Pole star; (iv) Maharloka, abode coexistent with that of Brahma, abode of Bhrigu and other munis; (v) Jnanaloka, abode of Sanaka, Sanandan and Sanatkumar, sons of Brahma; (vi) Tapoloka, abode of deities; and (vii) Satyaloka or Brahmaloka, abode of Brahma. The first three worlds are destroyed at the end of every kalpa.

Lokpals: Guardian deities of the eight cardinal and intermediate points of the compass. (See Digpal). They are allotted elephants each to hold

their posts. (See Diggaj).

Lomash: A celebrated rishi who dwelt on Sumer mount.

Madhu: One of the two mighty and horrible asuras who were slain by Vishnu. The story is related in *Markandeya Purana:* During the deluge, Vishnu was reclining on the serpent bed at the end of a kalpa. The two asura brothers, Madhu and Kaitabh, were born and endeavoured to slay Brahma himself. Prajapati saw the two wrathful asuras and prayed that Vishnu might rise and slay the wicked monsters. As Vishnu awoke he saw Madhu and Kaitabh, warlike with red eyes engaging Brahma in combat. Vishnu, in a terrible encounter, slew the two giants.

Mahabharata*: The *Mahabharata,* written by Vyasa, is one of the immortal epics of India. It is the story of a war between two families of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

Mahadeva: One of the names of Shiva meaning 'great god'. See Shiva.

Mahodara: Literally 'great belly'. Also known as Matya. A brother of Ravana. Mahodara tried to dissuade Ravana from meeting Rama in a fair encounter and suggested that they should declare that Rama had been slain in battle and then make Śita bend to his evil will.

Mai: Son of Diti. Daitya architect and artificer of the Asuras. He had constructed the golden fort on Mount Trikut in Lanka. Hema the celestial apsara, had been given to him by the gods. By her he had two sons Maivi and Dundubhi and a beautiful daughter named Mandodari who was married to Ravana and became queen of Lanka.

Mainak Mount: A small mountain in the ocean between India and Ceylon. Indra had once started clipping off wings of mountains. The god of Wind had helped Mainak to fly away and seek refuge in the ocean. To repay the god of Wind for the help given to him, Mount Mainak offered to provide respite to Hanuman on his way across the ocean.

Maivi: Son of Mai, the daitya architect of the Asuras. Elder brother of Dundubhi. Killed by Bali in Kishkindha. See Bali

Makar: The eleventh month of the Hindu year. At the time when the sun enters the mansion of Capricornus in this month, a bathing festival is held at Ganga in Prayag.

Malyavan: Brother of Sumali, father of Kaikesi, mother of Ravana. Hence Malyavana was grand maternal uncle of Ravana. He advised the ten headed démon King to seek reconciliation with Rama by sending Sita back to him.

Mandakini: The river Payasvini in Chitrakoot. Has its source in Rishyavana mount and flowing along Chitrakoot meets the River Yamuna.

*See Krishna.

Mandodari: Daughter of Mai and the celestial apsara Hema. Married to Ravana, king of Lanka. A renowned beauty and an enlightened woman who tried repeatedly to dissuade Ravana from seeking strife against Rama.

Mandrachal: Mount Mandra. The mountain which was placed on the Tortoise, the second avatar of Vishnu, and served as the churning stick for churning of the ocean.

Mandavi: Elder daughter of Kushdhwaj, wife of Bharat.

Mani: According to tradition, the snake has a jewel set in its skull which acts as an antidote to its poison. The jewel is also supposed to emit a light and, if its mani is removed from a snake, it is blinded and writhes in agony.

Manthara: Hunchbacked maid servant of Queen Kaikeyi, favourite wife of King Dashratha. She belonged to Kekaya and had come from Kaikeyi's home. Manthra became an important character in the *Ramayana* by succeeding in persuading Kaikeyi to ask for banishment of Rama and Bharat's enthronement.

Mantra: An incantation; Vedic text or hymn. According to orthodox Vedic scholars the Vedas consist of Mantras and Brahmanas. The Mantras include the Samhitas, and the Brahmanas include the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. Mantra is also a sacred aphorism conveyed by a guru to his pupil to serve as an ideal for the pupil. Repetition of the name of God and short phrases of His Glory is also contained in Mantras.

Mareech: Maternal uncle and ally of Ravana. Son of Taraka the demoness. Once Maricha interfered with a yajna being performed by sage Vishwamitra. Rama sped a weapon at him which struck him with such force that he was flung one hundred yojans into the sea. Later, on Ravana's commands, Mareech assumed the form of a golden deer to draw Rama away into the woods and thus enable Ravana to kidnap Sita.

Markandeya: A celebrated rishi. From his very childhood Markandeya was a dedicated rishi deeply absorbed in meditation on the Lord. Even Indra was afraid lest Markandeya attained his position. He thereupon requested Kamadeva to detract the great rishi from his concentrated meditation. But all artifices of Kama failed and the rishi remained steadfast in devotion. Pleased with his penances, the Lord appeared to him in the form of Nara Narayana and asked Markandeya to seek a boon. The rishi requested the Lord to acquaint him with the delusive power of His Maya. God then made it appear to Markandeya that the whole world was engulfed in a flood of waters and only Akshaywat, the imperishable fig tree at Prayag, remained above water. Narayan Himself took the from of a small child and seated himself on its topmost

branch. The terrified sage looked beseechingly towards the Child and He held out His small hand and drew the sage to safety on the tree.

Maruts: Children of Diti. (see Diti). The storm gods of the Vedas. Friends and allies of Indra. Armed with lightning and thunderbolts. (See also 'forty-nine winds').

Matanga: Literally 'an elephant'. Matanga was the son of a Chandal but was brought up as a brahmin. Once Matang was mercilessly goading an ass's foal he was driving. The mother ass told the foal that she could not expect better treatment from one born as a chandal. Matanga then underwent severe penances and austerities. He balanced himself on his big toe and remained absorbed in meditation till his body was reduced to skin and bones. Sita and Rama visited the sage in his ashram during their sojourn in the woods.

Maya: The veiling force of nature which, according to Advaita Vedanta, leads to the illusion of duality. The unreal phenomenal world as opposed to Brahman.

Mayanda: One of the brave warriors of the vanar armies. Brahma had bestowed a draught of nectar upon him. Mayanda was the son of Ashwinikumar and brother of Dwivinda. He was one of the brave warriors sent southwards by Sugriva, along with Jambwan, Angad and Hanuman to search for Sita. Later, Mayanda accompanied the vanar armies to Lanka and slew Yupaksh, one of the mighty demon warriors in the battles of Lanka.

Meghnad: Literally 'call of thunder'. Son of Ravana and Mandodari. Also known as Indrajit, a name earned by him for his successful exploit in which he defeated Indra himself. Meghnad was one of the most powerful warriors in the War of Lanka.

Meru: A fabulous mountain on which Svarga, the heaven of Indra, is situated. It contains the cities of gods and habitation of celestial spirits. Also known as Sumera, 'golden mountain'. Topographically, it is a mountain peak North of Himalayas.

Mithila: Capital of Videha in North Bihar which corresponds to modern Tirhut between Gandak and Kosi rivers.

Moksha: Salvation.

Moon: According to legend, Brihaspati, guru of the gods, on one occasion while returning from his bath in the Ganga, found his wife Tara in the embraces of the moon god. On seeing Brihaspati, the moon god sped away and as he went past, Brihaspati threw his dripping bath towel at his face. As the towel hit him, his face was injured, marks of which are seen as the spots in the moon. The moon god had by Brihaspati's wife Tara, a son named Budh, the regent of the planet Mercury.

Mridanga: A kind of tambourine.

Muni: A sage.

Nahusha: Son of Ayus, the eldest son of Pururavas who reigned at Pratishthana along the Ganga on the opposite bank of Prayag. Nahusha was father of Yayati. King Nahusha by his austerities and valour had acquired sway over three worlds, but ultimately fell into evil ways and was destroyed. Once when Indra had temporarily relinquished his throne in heaven due to killing of a priest, Nahusha usurped the throne and demanded love of Indrani, queen of Indra. She agreed to receive him if he came to her on a palanquin borne by rishis. At his request, seven rishis agreed to do so; but as they bore him on a palanquin he was so inflamed with arrogance and lust that he rebuked the rishis for not walking fast enough. Disgusted by his abuse and violence, the rishis cursed Nahusha to become a snake.

Nal: Son of Vishwakarma, the god of handicrafts and arts. Vishwakarma had blessed his son with the boon of mastery in the art of stonework. According to legend Nal along with Neel, in childish prank, used to throw items of worship of saints and sages into rivers. Sorely distressed at their mischief, the sages cursed the boys that whatever they threw into water would float and remain there. This capacity of the boys was later helpful in their constructing the bridge over the ocean to Lanka.

Nandigram: A village known as Nandi about three kilometers from Ayodhya. Bharat resided in this village as a hermit during fourteen years of Rama's banishment.

Nara Narayana: Nara in conjunction with Narayana are aspects of the Divine Imperishable spirit that pervades the Universe. Considered as emanations of Vishnu and termed as 'devan': two gods or 'purva devan', the two original gods.

Narada: Son of Brahma. The celestial hermit and devotee of Vishnu. Endowed with deep learning and author of many hymns and aphorisms, the most famous amongst them being the *Bhaktisutras* of Narada, which was a discourse on devotion in 84 aphorisms delivered by him to the great Maharshi Vedavyasa. Many of his hymns appear in *Rigveda.*

Narharyananda: Guru of Tulsidas.

Neel: See Mahodara, son of Agni, the fire god. A famous vanar warrior who led the armies of Sugriva. Amongst the demon warriors he slew in the war of Lanka were Nikumbh, Prahasta and Mahadora.

Nim: Founder of the dynasty of Mithila and ancestor of King Janaka, father of Sita, Divine consort of Rama. Nim was the twelfth son of Ikshwaku. He founded a new city called Vaijayanta. Nim wished to perform a yajna and he invited sage Vashist to preside over the ceremony. Vashist however had an engagement in a yajna being

performed by Indra and asked Nim to await his return. Nim meanwhile invited Gautam rishi to preside over his yajna, his ashram being about 40 kilometers from the city he had founded. When Vashist returned he found that the yajna had been completed and he cursed Nim with death for not having waited for him. Nim also cursed Vashist with death as his curse was unreasonable. Thus both lost their bodies. Vashist was reborn but Nim declined to take a body again and prayed that he may reside in the eyes of all creation.

Nine Forms of Devotion: The nine forms of devotion are: (i) *shravan,* listening to the deeds of God; (ii) *kirtan,* singing hymns to Lord; (iii) *smaran,* meditating on God; (iv) *puja,* worship; (v) *charan-seva,* service as a devotee; (vi) *vandana,* invocational prayer or beseeching; (vii) *dasya,* service as a pupil; (viii) *mitrata,* friendship; (ix) *samarpan,* unconditional offering of oneself.

Nine Nidhis: The nine nidhis or heavenly treasures of Kuvera, the god of wealth are (i) Padma; (ii) Mahapadma; (iii) Makara; (iv) Kachchhapa; (v) Mukunda; (vi) Nanda; (vii) Nila; (viii) Sankha; (ix) Kharba. The nidhis exist wherever there is good fortunes (Riddhi); in conjunction with Riddhi, the Siddhis are manifested.

Nine Poetical Styles: The nine poetical styles are (i) *Shringara rasa,* or erotic; (ii) *Hasya rasa,* or comic; (iii) *Karuna rasa,* or elegiac; (iv) *Bhayanak rasa,* or emotional; (vii) *Vibhatsa rasa,* or satiric; (viii) *Shanta rasa,* or didactic; (ix) *Adbhut rasa,* or sensational.

Nishads: Forest tribe dwelling in Eastern India. Guha was their king.

Ocean of Milk: One of the seven oceans described in the Puranas.

Om: A compound of three letters a, u, and m, representing the Hindu Trinity of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma. A mantra of solemn invocation and benediction. The word is used at the commencement of prayers and religious ceremonies. It has mystic powers worthy of deepest meditation. It is so sacred that when uttered as a mantra, it must not be heard by others.

Pampa: A river which has its source in the Rishyamuka hills and joins the river Tungbhadra below Anagundi. Also a lake in the same locality in Bellary district of Mysore.

Panchvati: Identified with the present Nasik in Maharashtra. Some authorities relate Ranchvati to forests near the mouth of the Godavari river. Others identify it with Janasthan South-West of Dandakya.

Paramatma: The Supreme Spirit.

Parashurama: The sixth avatar of Vishnu. Brahmin born, the fifth son of Jamadagni and Ranuka. A descendant of Bhrigu. His mother Renuka was of the royal family of Kusikas. Depicted as carrying an axe, given to him by Shiva. He became manifest in the beginning of

Tretayuga for the purpose of repressing tyranny of royal classes. The avatar of Parashurama is considered to be partial insomuch as he swept away the Kshattriya rulers who had begun to plunder the oppressed ones instead of protecting them, and then he bowed out to give place as an avatar to Rama, who came as an ideal Kshattriya to 'teach by example, the lesson of what should be, after the lesson of what should not be had been enforced'.

Parvati: Consort of Shiva, daughter of Himwant, king of the mountains and his queen Maina. Parvati is known by many other names: Girija, daughter of the mountains; Uma, light; Bhawani, the Divine Mother; Guari, fair; Durga; Kali, destroyer; Kalika, black; Shakti, female energy of Shiva; Aparna, 'who took not even leaves'. In her Ardhangini form, she is combined with the form of Shiva. Parvati is mother of Ganesha and Kartik.

Patala: The infernal regions, seven in number, inhabited visited by nagas, Daityas, Davanas, Yakshas etc. When Narada visited these regions he declared that they were more delightful than Indra's heaven, having more pleasures and comforts contained therein. The infernal regions are seven in number: (i) Atala; (ii) Vitala; (iii) Nitala; (iv) Rasatala; (v) Mahatala; (vi) Sutala; and (vii) Patala.

Payasvini River: Chitrakoot or Mandakini River. It has its source in Rishyavan mountains and meets the Yamuna after flowing along Chitrakoot.

Pingla: A prostitute. On evening she was awaiting one of her lovers after she had adorned her body, but he did not arrive even till midnight. Pingla reflected upon the vice of her life and thought of all the time she had spent in adorning her body for carnal pleasures. She decided to spend her remaining life in devotion to the Lord. Doing so, she earned salvation.

Pisachas: Fiends, evil spirits, lower than Rakshas; lower and most malignant of lower beings.

Poorna (Poornavatar): Perfect, full and ideal. Sri Rama and Sri Krishna are considered to be Poornavatars being born as avatars and having lived their to complete earthly lives as avatars.

Prahasta: (i) Son of Sumali and Ketumati. Brother of Kaikasi, mother of Ravana. Hence Prahasta was maternal uncle of Ravana. He was commander-in-chief of the demon armies.

Prahlad: Son of Hiranyakashipu, a Daitya king. It is said that when the child was still in his mother's womb, Narada taught his mother that Narayana was the One Supreme God. Hiranyakashipu had decreed that all obeisance should be paid to him with the words "Glory to Hiranya" at the commencement of all auspicious works. In his fifth year Prahlad

was sent to study under the royal guru. When Prahlad was asked to commence his studies by paying obeisance, he chanted: 'Om Namo Narayana', Worship to the Supreme God Narayana. The royal teacher reported this to the king who ordered his own child to be put to death. However all weapons failed to kill the child. A sword lay broken from his neck; poison failed as Vishnu appeared and ate first of the poisoned rice; Indra's elephant Airavata, borrowed by the cruel father could not crush him; thrown into the sea he would not drown; fire would not burn him. The name of Hari was forever on his lips. Finally his father, challenging the omnipresence of Divinity, pointed to the stone pillar and said mockingly: "Is your Hari also in the pillar ?" Prahlad gazed at the stone pillar. "Hari! Hari!" prayed the boy and the pillar burst asunder, and the mighty Divine Form came as the Man-Lion and slew Hiranyakashipu.

Prajapati: Lord of creatures. The seventeen Prajapatis are stated as: (1) Kardam; (2) Vikrant; (3) Shesha; (4) Sushrava; (5) Bahuputra; (6) Sthanu; (7) Marich; (8) Atri; (9) Kratu; (10) Pulastya; (11) Angira; (12) Varuna; (13) Pulha; (14) Daksha; (15) Vavaswan; (16) Arishtnemi; and (17) Kashyap.

Prakriti: Nature as opposed to the spirit. The personified Will of the Supreme in creation. The original primordial eternally existing essence from which everything emanates. From Prakriti also emanate as sources of other products the two eternal faculties of Buddhi, the intellect; and Ahankara, self consciousness. From these are produced the five subtle elements and the five gross elements of ether, air, fire, water and earth. Also produced are the eleven organs comprising five organs of senses (buddhis-indriyas): ear, skin, eyes, nose and tongue; five organs of actions (karma-indriyas): larynx, hand, foot, excretory and generative organs; and lastly, the mind, combining and coordinating the organs of senses and actions. Thus the eight producers, namely:Prakriti, Buddhi, Ahamkara, the five subtle elements; along with the five gross elements; and the eleven organs are the twenty-four essences. Purusha, the soul, which is neither a production nor a producer, together with these twenty-four essences constitute the elements of the phenomenal world. In the Vedas hymn to the Lord as narrated by Tulsi in Uttara Kanda of his *Ramayana*, Prakriti is likened to the immortal tree whose endless roots are the Primordial creation. Four barks of the tree are Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha; its six boughs are the stages of life: conception, birth, childhood, manhood, old age, death; the twenty-five branches are the twenty-five essences of Prakriti. A creeper on the trunk of the tree is Maya, and sweet and bitter fruits are pleasure and pains of life.

Pratapbhanu: Son of King Satyaketu of Kekaya Brother of Arimardan. He became ruler of Kekaya. He ruled the kingdom wisely with his minister Dharmaruchi, and he extended his empire throughout the country. Misled by one of the kings whom he had defeated and who dwelt in the woods nearby. Pratapbhanu incurred a curse from Brahmins for mixing human flesh in food served to them. Kings defeated by him rose in revolt and he was killed. Born as Ravana in his next birth.

Pravarshana: A hill near River Tungabhadra on which Rama resided after Bali had been slain and he awaited vanars to bring news of Sita's whereabouts.

Prayag: One of the most celebrated pilgrimages; at the confluence of the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna. Prayag finds frequent references in the *Ramayana.* The present-day name of the city is Allahabad.

Pulastya: A son of Brahma. A great rishi who was also one of the Prajapatis. Learned and stated to have received the *Vishnu Purana* from Brahma.

Puranas: Meaning 'old'. These ancient legends succeed the epic poems. Puranas celebrate the power of gods and are scriptures representing the growth of Hinduism. The deal with creation of the universe, its destruction; genealogy of gods etc. There are eighteen Puranas containing 400,000 couplets. In addition there are eighteen Up-Puranas. All the Puranas are classified into three groups according to the qualities which prevail in them. The *Matsya Purana* clarifies that Puranas in which glory of Hari or Vishnu prevails are Sattvik. To this class belong the *Vishnu, Narada, Bhagavat, Garuda, Padma* and *Varaha* Puranas. Those in which the legends of Agni or Shiva predominate are Tamas. To this class belong the *Matsya, Kurma, Linga, Shiva, Skanda* and *Agni* Puranas. The Skanda Purana is the longest containing 81,000 couplets. The Puranas which dwell most on the stories of Brahma and Rajas. Belonging to this group are *Brahma, Brahmanda Vaivarta, Markandeya, Bhavishya* and *Vamana* Puranas. The *Vamana Purana* is the shortest containing 10,000 couplets. The invariable form of the Puranas is that of a dialogue in which some person relates its contents in reply to the enquiries of another. Such dialogues are interwoven with others which are repeated as having been held on other occasions between different individuals.

Purushottama: Literally 'best of men'. The word 'Purusha' is used in mythical sense of soul of universe. The compound word thus means 'Supreme Soul'.

Pushpak: The Pushpak chariot belonged to Kuvera, Lokpal of the North. The chariot was in the form of a lotus flower with thirty-two petals in the outer part. The middle had sixteen petals and the inner portion had

eight petals. The tip of each petal was studded with gems. Its canopy was held with pillars of gold and strings of pearls formed curtains within. It had a fantastic speed described as 'the speed of the mind.' The chariot had controls of speed and direction. Jewelled steps provided access. Ravana seized the chariot from Kuvera after he had waged battle against his half brother. On death of Ravana, the Pushpak chariot conveyed Rama to Ayodhya and thereafter Rama had it sent back to Kuvera.

Radha: Daughter of Vrishbanu and Kirti of Barsana in Vraja. Beloved of Krishna. Radha represents the highest form of devotional love, seeking nothing yet giving all.

Raga: Tune, melody.

Raghavananda: A Vaishnava teacher of the school of Ramanuja, who settled in Varanasi with his disciples and taught devotion of Rama to men of all castes and vocations.

Raghu: An ancestor of Rama. Their family came to be known after his name.

Raghukul: The clan or family of Raghu.

Raguvira: A name of Rama meaning 'Brave warrior of Raghu's clan'.

Rahu: A daitya. Son of Viprachitta and Sinhika. When nectar was produced on churning of the ocean, gods and daityas quarrelled amongst themselves to take it. Vishnu took the form of a comely maiden and took the pitcher. The Daityas were so enamoured of the maiden's beauty that they forgot the nectar for which they had quarrelled. The gods and Daityas sat in rows and Vishnu commenced distributing the nectar, starting with the gods. Rahu understood the intent of finishing the nectar before the turn of Daityas came and he surreptitiously sat amongst gods between Sun and the Moon. As Rahu got a draught of the nectar he was discovered as an imposter by Sun and Moon and they directed Vishnu's attention towards him. Vishnu struck him with his disc but Rahu had become immortal by virtue of having taken the nectar. His head became Rahu and the lower part of his body was transformed into Ketu. Placed in the stellar sphere, Rahu became the ascending and Ketu the descending node. Rahu is supposed to take revenge on the Sun and Moon for disclosing his identity to Vishnu by swallowing them periodically which causes the eclipses.

Rajas: One of the three *gunas* of Maya or Prakriti. Gunas are ingredients of Maya and the three different gunas are typified with different qualities. 'The principle trait of rajas is energy and from it had emanated the primal flow of activity. The effect of rajas in a human being is ceaseless activity through which expression is given to ambition, lust, anger, avarice, arrogance, egotism, envy, pride, jeal-

ousy and so forth. Under its influence, a man becomes violently attached to the world. Rajas is the source of suffering. (Swami Nikhilananda).

Rajya: Kingdom, period of reign.

Rakshasa(-i): Demons. Enemies of gods. When Brahma was manifested from the lotus in waters, he created sea-life to inhabit the ocean. Thereafter the creatures came to him seeking something to do. Brahma asked them to look after waters of the oceans. Some of them said they would engage themselves in 'raksha', that is, protection of the waters, whilst others decided to spend their time in their 'yaksha' or worship. Brahma thereupon said that those who had offered to do 'raksha' would be called Rakshas, and those who would devote themselves to 'yaksha' would be named as Yakshas. Hetu and Prahetu were the ancestors of Rakshasas. Rakshasi is a female demoness.

Rama, Ramachandra: The seventh avatar of Vishnu, Rama, manifested Himself in Tretayuga. Took Form as the earthly son of King Dashratha and Queen Kaushilya. Rama is said to have ruled for ten thousand years in Tretayuga.

Ramanand: A saint born in AD 1300 and died in AD 1411, Ramanand was one of the greatest preachers of Rama and he expounded the teachings of Rama and his worship in Northern India. Amongst his disciples were Raidas, Pipa and Kabir.

Ramanama: The Holy Name of Rama. Considered to be a mantra by itself, which repeated with constant and deep meditation, would lead to enlightenment.

Ramanuja: Born in AD 1070 and died in AD 1146. Founder of the sect of Vaishnavites. Propounder of basic philosophy of Vishistadvaita or qualified monism, seeking to reconcile the growing trend of devotional thought to the monist standpoint of Sankara.

Rama-rajya: The period of reign of Rama. A term now applied to correspond to a period when virtue, prosperity and welfare is given to every man. Tulsi describes Rama-rajya in his *Ramayana.*

Ramayana: The story of the deeds of Rama. First composed by Valmiki in Sanskrit in about 5 BC. The story of the *Ramayana* has been retold by many poets: Kalidasa in his *Raghuvamsha* (5th century); Pravarasena in *Setubandha* (6th century); Kumaradasa in *Janakiharana* (6th century); Bhuvabhuti in *Uttararamacarita* (8th century); Murari in *Anargharaghava* (10th century); *Hanumannataka* (10th century); Jayadeva in Prasannaraghava (13th century); Vedavyasa in *Adhyatma Ramayana* (15th century); and *Ananda Ramayana* (15th century). All these versions are in Sanskrit. The deeds of Rama have also been written in various modern Indian languages: The *Kamban Ramayana*

in Tamil (12th century); *Ranganatha Ramayana* in Telugu (13th century); *Kannassa Ramayana* (15th century); *Krittivasa Ramayana* in Bengali (15th century); *Balaramdasa Ramayana* and *Vilanka Ramayana* in Oriya (15th century); *Ramacharitmanasa* in Hindi (16th century); Ezuttacana's *Adhyatma Ramayana* in Malayalam (16th century); *Torave Ramayana* in Canarese (16th century); *Ekanatha's Ramayana* in Marathi (16th century). The *Ramayana* has also been rendered in other languages in various countries. The *Ramayana Kakavin* (10th century) and popular forms in 16th century are available in Indonesia. Long poems on the *Ramayana* in Tibet (9th century); Eastern Turkistan (9th century); Indo-China (16th century); Thailand (16th century). The *Ramayana* has been translated into English by many authors: Griffith translated into poetry the *Valmiki Ramayana;* Casey and Marshman translated two books of the *Ramayana;* V.V.S. Aiyar translated the *Kamba Ramayana;* Rajagopalachari translated *Valmiki Ramayana* in prose; Sudha Mazumdar translated *Krittivasa Ramayana;* Growse translated the *Ramacharitmanasa* of Tulsidas in prose. Translations are also available in other European languages: Signor Gorreseo translated *Valmiki Ramayana* in Italian; Schlegel translated the first book in Latin.

Rambha: An apsara of exquisite beauty who had emerged out of churning of the ocean. Requested by Indra, she turned her charms on sage Vishwamitra to detract him from his penances and incurred his wrath thereby and a curse. Latter, while she was going to meet Nal Kuvera, son of Kuvera, Ravana met her near Mount Kailash and was infatuated by her tantalizing beauty. He ravished her even though she begged to be left alone as she was going as the wife of his half brother's son. For this sin, Nal Kuvera cursed Ravana with death if he sought to ravish any damsel against her wishes.

Rati: Love and desire. Goddess of love and sexual pleasures. Daughter of Daksha and wife of Kama, the god of Love.

Rantideva: Son of Sankriti. King Rantideva was famed for his righteousness. He went into the woods with his wife and son for penances. Once he was able to get some food for himself and his family after forty-eight days. Just as they were about to take the food, a mendicant arrived and Rantideva gave him all the food they had. Pleased with his devotion and righteousness, the Lord granted him His Heavenly Abode.

Ravana: The ten headed demon king of Lanka. Son of Visarwa and Kaikesi. A mighty warrior who had obtained the boon of invincibility against all other than human beings and vanars whom he considered too meek. Forced his half brother Kuvera to relinquish the kingdom of Lanka for him. Later he stormed Kuvera at Mount Kailash and carried

off his Pushpak chariot. Riding his newly captured chariot, the ten headed demon king proudly flew towards Sharvana forests where Kartik, son of Shiva and Parvati had taken birth. Shiva dwelt on a mountain in these forests. Being denied entry therein, the mighty demon king seething with fury and declared he would topple the mountain with his bare hands. He pushed the hill and as it shook, Parvati trembled and clung to Shiva. Lord Mahadeva pressed his foot on the mountain and the demon king's arm was caught in the rocks. As he roared aloud people in three worlds cried in fright at the terrible sound. The demon king then prayed to Shiva to appease him. Pleased with his penance, Shiva released him and told him that he would henceforth be known as 'Ravana' one who made the three worlds cry by his loud roar. Having obtained boons of invincibility, Ravana strode into the world intoxicated with lust and vainglory. He fared into the beautiful Himalayan woods where he saw a lovely maiden absorbed in meditation. He gazed upon her enchanting beauty and filled with desire asked her who she was. She told him that she was the daughter of Kushdhwaj, son of Brihaspati, guru of the gods. As she grew into a comely maiden, demons and gandharvas asked for her hand in marriage, but her father had determined to wed her to Vishnu. The disappointed demons killed her father and she fared into the woods to engage herself in penance to obtain Vishnu as her husband. Ravana caught her by her beautiful tresses seeking to capture her by force. Vedavati, the maiden, thereupon struck her hair by her hand and stupefied Ravana held only her shorn tresses in his hands. The maiden thereupon burnt herself warning Ravana that she would be reborn to become the cause of his death. She was thereafter born as Sita. Unmindful of the curses and warnings heaped upon him, Ravana continued his vile exploits. So mighty was he that he forced great kings to either fight or acknowledge defeat at his hands. Thus King Maruta of Ushirbij, Dushyanta Surath, Gadhi, Gaya, Pururva conceded victory to the mighty Ravana whilst great warriors of the fame of King Anaranya of Ayodhya took up arms against him only to be vanquished by the demon hero. Ravana spared none. He challenged even Yama, the god of Death, and fought determinedly till Yama had to withdraw conceding victory. Pleased with his victory over Yama, the demon king next challenged Varuna and his sons. A mighty battle ensued in which Ravana was grievously wounded; but aided by Mahodara, the demon king soon vanquished Varuna's sons, and Varuna himself went away to Brahmaloka conceding victory to Ravana. In the mad zeal of warfare Ravana killed his own sister's husband. Expressing regrets to wailing Surpnakha, he declared: "I was intoxicated with the rising fumes of

battle and I lost discrimination. Speeding arrows continuously I saw neither friend nor foe." From lust of war Ravana turned to lust for womankind. He captured daughters of gods, sages and Danavas. Beauty was his sole criterion and he ravished even his own half brother's son's wife Rambha. He spared neither the king of gods Indra from his passion for war nor held back from trying to sin against pure Sita, Divine Consort of Rama, in his overpowering lust for beauty. The mightiest of warriors was also the vilest; and gods and humans heaved a sigh of relief when the great demon king was slain by Rama in the war of Lanka. Of his own might the proud demon king had said : "I made Brahma narrator of Panchanga; the Sun my watchman; Moon, my canopy holder; Varuna, my water-man; Vayu my sweeper; Agni my cook; Indra my gardener; Yama, my personal guard; wives of gods my maid servants; and Ganesha, keeper of my stables."

Rishi: An inspired sage. The seven rishis (Saptarshi) were Gautama, Bharadwaj, Vishwamitra, Jamadagni, Vashista, Kashyapa and Atri. They are represented by the Great Bearconstellation in the skies.

Rishyamuk: A mountain located in Bellari district of Madras state. Near Pampa or Hampi.

Rohini: The ninth lunar asterism personified as the daughter of Daksha and wife of Moon. Also name of mother of Balarama, brother of Lord Krishna. A cow.

Saguna: Literally 'with attributes'. The term is applied to the manifestation of Divinity in association with attributes in the world of Maya. Thus manifested, the Saguna form of Divinity is endowed with such qualities as omniscience, universal lordship and unlimited power.

Sahasrabahu: A mighty king of the kingdom of Haihaya. Also known as Kartavirya. Named Sahasrabahu because of his thousand arms which he had obtained by a boon from Brahma. Known as King Arjuna of Mahishmati, the capital of Haihaya. The city was located on the Narbada river. During the course of his exploits of vanquishing kings, Ravana reached Mahishmati and challenged King Arjuna either to fight or acknowledge defeat. Arjuna had at that moment gone to the Narbada river with his queens to sport in its waters. Ravana followed him and bewitched by the beauty of the waters of the river, he took his path there and started offering prayers to Shiva. Meanwhile King Arjuna, or Sahasrabáhu, held waters of the river with his thousand arms. The afflux thus caused flooded Ravana's offerings which he was making further upstream of the river. Ravana flew in a rage and engaged Sahasrabahu in battle. The mighty King Arjuna held Ravana in his thousand arms and brought him captive to Mahismati. He later released Ravana on the intervention of Pulastya muni.

Sai: A tributary of the Ganga, flowing between the Gomati and Ganga rivers in Uttar Pradesh.

Samadhi: Ecstasy, trance; complete concentration; communion with God. The state of samadhi or trance is induced by Practice and Dispassion in two ways: in the first, all external impressions are shut off from the conscience; and in other even internal self initiated activities cease.

Sampati: Son of Garuda; grandson of Vinita and brother of Jatayu. He was seriously burnt by rays of the sun when he flew perilously close to it with his brother Jatayu. Sampati gave valuable information to Hanuman regarding Sita's whereabouts in Lanka when the vanar party met him on their southward journey.

Sanakadi: Four learned sons of Brahma collectively known as Sanakadi, their individual names being: Sanaka, Sanandan, Sanatkumar and Sanatana. In Uttarkhand of *Skanda Purana,* Sanakadi discourse with Narada and Suta on the transcendency and greatness of the *Ramayana.* The four great sages visited Rama after his coronation in Ayodhya.

Sankara: South Indian sage of the late 8th or early 9th century. Propounded form synthesis of spiritual texts of Hinduism the Advaita (non-dual, that is, monist) Vedanta system, which established itself as the standard philosophy of intellectual Hinduism.

Saraswati: Goddess of speech and learning. Patroness of arts and sciences. Credited with having invented the Sanskrit and Devanagari script of Hindi.

Sari: The main garment of women in India.

Sarama: Daughter of Shailusha, King of Gandharvas. Married to Vibhishana youngest brother of Ravana. Both Vibhishana and Sarama were virtuous and lived according to precepts of dharma. She was born on the banks of Mansarovar. It is said that when she was about to be born there was heavy rain due to which waters of the lake started rising. Sarama's mother was alarmed for the safety of the child about to be born and she exclaimed: 'Sarama!' meaning 'waters! do not rise!' The baby girl when born was named Sarama.

Satrughan: Son of King Dashratha and Queen Sumitra. Twin brother of Lakshmana. The two twin brothers were similar in looks and temperament. Satrughan attached himself to service of Bharat as Lakshman did to service and devotion to Rama.

Satrupa: Wife of Swayambhuv Manu. They are considered to be the first man and woman of creation. Their son was King Uttanpad who was the father of Dhruva.

Sati: Daughter of Daksha. Consort of Shiva. Renounced by Shiva for assuming the form of Sita to test Divinity of Rama. Later she ended her

life at her father's home in protest of the insult meted out to Shiva by not giving a place of honour to him in the yajna being performed by her father.

Sattva: One of the three gunas, Sattva is the giver of happiness and is the real friend of man in his effort to realise Truth. It manifests itself in man as humility, guilelessness, self-control, unselfishness, purity, contentment, truthfulness, fearlessness, faith, devotion, yearning for Liberation, and other similar spiritual attributes.

Satyaketu: King of Kekaya. Father of Prataphanu and Arimardan who are stated to have been born as Ravana and Kumbhakarana in their next births due to curse of Brahmins. See Pratapbhanu.

Seven calamities: The seven calamities or iti are said to be (i) drought; (ii) locusts; (iii) floods; (iv) rats; (v) parrots; (vi) mutiny; and (vii) invasion.

Seven constituents: The seven constituents of the human body according to Hindu medicine are : (i) *rasa:* chyle; (ii) *rakta:* blood; (iii) *mansa:* flesh; (iv) *meda:* fat; (v) *asthi:* bone; (vi) *majja:* marrow; (vii) *sukra* semen.

Shabri: A bhilni woman said to be of the Saora tribe. She served Matang rishi with great devotion, and when Matang left for his heavenly abode, Shabri requested to be permitted to accompany him. The rishi asked her to await the advent of Rama.

Shambhu: One of the names of Shiva. See 'Shiva'.

Sharbhang: A celebrated sage who dwelt in the outskirts of the Dandaka forests.

Shastra: A treatise on religion; scriptures and sacred books.

Shatananda: Chief priest of King Janaka of Mithila. Elder son of Gautam rishi and Ahalya.

Shesha: See 'Adishesha'.

Shiva: One of the three principal gods who form the Trinity or triad of Hindu religious pantheon; Brahma representing the Creator; Vishnu, the Sustainer; and Shiva, the Destroyer. Known by various names such as Mahadeva (great god); Tripurari (slayer of the three sons of Tarak the asura: Tarakaksh, Vindumali and Kamalochana); Shankara; Madandahan, Kamaripu (slayer of Kama, the god of love, by the wrathful fire of his third eye); Rudra (as avatar in form of Hanuman); Mahesha (great Lord); Vishwanath (master of universe); Trinaina (three eyed, one eye being located in his forehead); Bhairava (the terrible; Neelkanth (blue throated); Pashupati (lord of beings); Vyomakesha (whose hair is the sky). The vehicle of Shiva is Nandi, the bull. He holds a trident and bears the crescent moon on his forehead.

Shiva's Bow: A mighty bow made by Shiva to destroy his father-in-law

Daksha, the Prajapati, after his Consort Sati had ended her life at her father's place because of insult meted out to him. The bow was later taken by the gods who gave it to Devarat, an ancestor of Janaka. Since then the bow had remained in Janakpur till Rama broke it while stringing it to win Sita's hand in marriage.

Shudra: According to the concept of the Vedic seers, shudras, or labourers, were born from the feet of the Purusha, or Cosmic person. In the delineation of men into caste system, Indo-Aryans recognised shudras as suppliers of manual labour. According to the *Bhagavadgita,* the duty of a sudra, born of his own nature, is action consisting of service.

Shuka: Minister of Ravana who along with another minister Sarana, was sent by the demon king as a spy to ascertain the strength of the vanar army. Shuka went disguised as a vanar but was recognised as a demon spy in disguise. They were allowed to return to Lanka.

Siddhashram: The name of the ashram in which sage Vishwamitra had taken abode.

Siddhis: Said to be a class of semi-divine beings of great purity and holiness who dwell in the region of the sky between the earth and the sun. Identified with eight accomplishments and miraculous powers which may be acquired by saints. The eight siddhis are: (i) *Anima:* the power of becoming infinitely small; (ii) *Mahima:* the power of increasing size at will; (iii) *Garima:* the power of becoming infinitely heavy; (iv) *Laghima:* the power of becoming infinitely light; (v) *Prapti:* obtaining whatever one desires; (vi) *Prakamya:* doing whatever one desires; (vii) *Isitva:* absolute supremacy; and (vii) *Vasitva:* subduing anyone.

Sinikha: A female demoness also known as Angarika. Mother of Rahu. She dwelt in the ocean midway between Bharat and Lanka, and had the powers of capturing anyone she wished by holding his reflection in the water. Slain by Hanuman on his way to Lanka.

Sita: Divine Consort of Rama. Daughter of King Janaka of Mithila and Queen Sunaina.

Sivi: King Sivi, son of King Usinar had undergone penances to entitle him to a place in the heavens. Out of jealousy Indra changed himself into a hawk and requested Agni, god of fire, to take the form of a dove. They flew to the temple where Sivi was offering prayers and the dove flew into his lap seeking shelter against the hawk. Soon the hawk followed in and demanded the dove as its rightful spoil. King Sivi offered to compensate the loss and the hawk agreed to spare the dove for an equal weight of the king's flesh. The monarch placed the dove on a scale and weighed it against part of his own flesh. But even when he placed his

limbs on the scales, the dove weighed more. Ultimately the king placed his whole body on the scale. The gods restored him to life and bore him to the heavens.

Six Adversaries (Six Passions) : The six adversaries of virtuous life or the six passions, are known as : (i) *kama,* lust (ii) *krodha,* anger; (iii) *lobha,* greed; (iv) *moha,* infatuation; (v) *mada,* intoxication; (vi) *matsarya,* selfishness.

Six Seasons : The six seasons of the year are: (i) *hemant,* autumn; (ii) *sisir,* winter; (iii) *basant,* spring; (iv) *grishma,* summer; (v) *varsha,* rains; and (vi) *sharad,* early winter.

Six Tastes : The six different tastes are: (i) *madhur,* sweet; (ii) *amla,* sour; (iii) *lavana,* sally; (iv) *katu,* pungent; (v) *tikta,* bitter; (vi) *kashaya,* astringent.

Sixteen Modes of Female Adornment : The sixteen modes of adornment and the order in which a lady adorns her body are: (i) *ang suchi,* cleaning the body; (ii) *majjan,* bath; (iii) *amal vasan* clean clothes; (iv) *kesha savaran,* dressing hair; (v) *manga sindoor,* vermilion in hair parting; (vi) *mahavar,* colouring feet; (vii) *bhal khauri,* jewel on forehead; (vii) *chimbuk-til,* beauty spot on chin; (ix) *mehandi,* colouring hands with myrtle paste; (x) *anga raga,* perfuming body; (xi) *bhushana,* wearing ornaments; (xii) *pushpa prasang,* decking flowers; (xiii) *basrang mukh,* making breath fragrant by betels; (xiv) *danta ranjana,* tinting teeth with missi; (xv) *adhar rag,* painting lips; (xvi) *Kaajal,* black dye for the eyes.

Sixteen ways of paying honour : The sixteen ways of paying honour to visitors to whom respect is paid are: (i) *avahan,* welcome for those arriving after a long time or swagat for those who are frequent visitors; (ii) *asan,* seat; (iii) *arghya,* lustral water; (iv) *padya,* water for washing feet; (v) *achaman,* water for rinsing mouth; (iv) *snana,* bath; (vii) *vastra,* raiments; (viii) *chandan,* sandalwood paste; (ix) *pushpa,* flowers; (x) *dhup,* incense; (ix) *Arati,* holy flame; (xii) *Naivedha,* offerings; (xiii) *tambul,* betel and betel nut; (xiv) *dakshina,* gifts; (xv) *pradakishna,* circumambulation; (xiv) *visarjan* for those who depart for a long time or shain for those who are expected to return shortly.

Smritis: Religious texts which were transmitted to others by sages who had 'remembered' the substance of such texts. They include the dharamshastras, epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* Puranas.

Soma: (i) Juice of milky colour of the climbing plant Asclepias Acida which when fermented formed a beverage for gods.

(ii) The Moon, born of Atri and his wife Anusuya. Married twenty-four daughters of Daksha but loved Rohini most of all. On complaint by his other daughters, Daksha cursed Moon to be childless and to decay in

his youth. The daughters of Daksha interceded on behalf of their husband and he modified his curse insomuch as Moon's decay would be periodical. Hence waxing and waning of moon. The twenty-four daughters of Daksha became twenty-four lunar asterisms.

Sravan: Son of a blind sage. Accidentally killed by an arrow from Dasharatha's bow while he was hunting on the banks of the Tamasa river.

Sri: The goddess who is the presiding deity of the Vedas. When Hari, desired Brahma to be born she bore him in her womb for a full year. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (Adhyaya I, II.4) it is stated: "He desired: 'Let Brahma be born as a second to me. He the World Ruler of His Own Will paired with the goddess Sri and the seed became Brahma, Samavatsara (Joygiver of his children).

Sringi : Son of Vimandak, son of Maharshi Kashyap. Sringi was a great and celebrated Rishi, also known as Rishisringa. He was called by King Romapad to perform a yajna in his kingdom of Angadesh to placate the rain god and end the drought in his kingdom.

Sringaverpur: Now known as Singror, a small village about 35 kilometers North-West of Allahabad. The abode of Guha, chief of the forest tribe of Nishad.

Srishti: The world as created by Bramha.

Srutis: Spiritual texts revealed by rishis having been heard by them. The Vedas, Upanishads, Mantras and Brahmanas are Srutis.

Srutikirti: Younger daughter of Kushdwaj, brother of King Janak. Srutikriti was wedded to Satrughan, youngest son of King Dashratha.

Subahu: A fierce demon who came to defile the yajna being performed in Vishwamitra's ashram. Killed by Rama by an arrow of fire.

Subel: The hill in Lanka on which Rama camped with his vanar army prior to the war of Lanka.

Sugriva: Literally, 'handsome neck'. Son of Riksharaj of Kishkindha. Younger brother of Bali. Also said to be son of the Sun god.

Sumentra: Chief counsellor or minister of King Dashrath.

Sumera: A mountain, said to be the navel of the earth. Also called Meru. See 'Meru'.

Sumitra: Queen of king Dashratha. Mother of twins Lakshmana and Satrughan.

Sunaina: Queen of King Janaka of Mithila. Mother of Sita and Urmila.

Sunder Kanda: The Book of beauty of the Ramayana. The fifth book in all versions of the Ramayana. Deals mainly with the exploits of Hanuman in Lanka.

Surpanakha: Literally: 'having nails like winnowing fans'. Sister of Ravana.

Sursa: One of the daughters of Daksha. She was mother of nagas (serpents). Assumed the form of a demoness to swallow Hanumana while he was on his way to Lanka but was outwitted by the vanar hero.

Surya: The sun or its deity. One of the three chief deities of the Vedas.

Sushena: A famous physician of Lanka. He prescribed four herbs: *Mritasanjivini, Vishalaykarni, Swarnkarni* and *Sadhani* to be brought from the Himalayas to heal Lakshmana who had been seriously wounded by Meghnad son of Ravana.

Sutikshana: A great sage who dwelt in the Dandaka woods. Rama stayed for a night in his ashram during his banishment.

Svayambhuva: A great and noble king of yore who performed severe penances in the woods with his wife Shatrupa.

Svayamprabha: Daughter of Merusvarna. Dwelt in a beautiful cave house made by Mai, architect of Danavas. When Mai fell in love with Hema the apsara, daughter of Vishwakarma. Indra drove him away and the golden cave house was given to Hema.

Svayamvar: The choice of a husband made by a princess from amongst a number of suitors assembled for the purpose.

Swami: Lord, master. Used as an epithet as for Kartikeya and as a title for ascetics or sages, a spiritual preceptor.

Tamas: Tamas is the veiling power that hides the true nature of a thing and makes it appear other than what it is. The influence of tamas is seen in man in his ignorance, lassitude, dullness, inadvertance and stupidity. It deprives a man of right judgment or definite belief and subjects him to doubt and uncertainty (Nikhilananda).

Tamsa: 'dark coloured'. The present name of the river is Tons. Tributary of the river Ganga. Dashratha incurred the curse of the blind sage on the banks of the Tamsa. Rama halted for a night on the banks of the river on the first lap of his journey to the forests on his exile.

Tapa: penance, religious austerity.

Tara: Daughter of Sushena; wife of Bali the vanar king of Kishkindha. Mother of Angad.

Taraka: Wife of Sunda the Daitya. Mother of Mareech the demon whom Rama slew in the form of the golden deer. Taraka reigned supreme in the woods near Vishwamitra's ashram in a radius of twenty kilometers and the forest was named after her.

Thousand Named Hymn: The *sahasranama* containing the thousand names of Vishnu.

Three corners: These are known as (i) family; (ii) wealth; and (iii) worldly reputation.

Three Omens: The three types of omens are; (i) *Pratyaksha*, manifest like sitting crow, asses braying; (ii) *Mansik*, of inner feelings like the

feelings in Bharat's heart as he sped to Ayodhya on being summoned by sage Vashist; (iii) *Chinnhaj*, manifest by signs like flickering of eyes or arms.

Three Pains: The three pains or afflictions are (i) *daihika*, pertaining to the body; (ii) *daivika*, pertaining to or done by the gods; (iii) *bhautika*, concerning the spirits.

Three Qualities: (Three Gunas) : Maya is said to consist of the three gunas known as Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The three gunas are present in varying degrees in all objects. At the end of a world cycle, when names and forms go back to the state of non-manifestation or involution, the gunas remain in a state of non-differentiation or equilibrium. Suddenly this equilibrium is disturbed by the Will of God, and the gunas begin to exert their individual characteristics. The three gunas always exist together. There cannot be pure Sattva without Rajas and Tamas; or pure Rajas without Sattva and Tamas; or pure Tamas without Sattva and Rajas. (Nikhilananda) See also 'Sattva', 'Rajas', and 'Tamas'.

Three Worlds: *Swarga*, the heavens; *bhim*, the earth; and *patala*, the infernal regions.

Tilak: A mark made on the forehead either as an emblem of sect or for adornment. Mark made on forehead during coronation.

Titwi: A legendry bird which is said to sleep with its feet upwards seeking to hold the sky should it fall.

Tretayuga: The second of the four yugas consisting of 3,600 years of Bramha or 1,266,000 years of life on earth. The avatars in the Vaman form and the that of Parashurama and Rama were in Tretayuga.

Trijata: A virtuous demoness amongst those Ravana had appointed to keep guard over Sita while she was held in captivity in the Ashoka Gardens in Lanka.

Trikut: A mountain in Ceylon. The city of Lanka was built amidst the mountains. On one of the peaks of Mount Trikut was a beautiful palace in which Ravana kept dancing company.

Trishanku: One of the kings of Ayodhya.

Trishira: (i) Commander of the demon armies in Janasthan who fought against Rama in the battles of the Dandaka woods.
(ii) Son of Ravana. A brave three headed demon who went into battle in the war of Lanka, along with his brothers Devantak and Narantak. He was slain by Hanuman.

Triveni: The confluence of Ganga and Yamuna at Prayag where the River Saraswati is also said to mingle with their waters.

Tulsi: The basil plant *(ocymum sacrum)*. Held in deep reverence by Hindus.

Tulsidas: Born 1497. Died 1623. Son of Atma Ram Dubey and Hulsi. Married to Ratna, daughter of Deenbandu Pathak.

Two Boons of Dashratha: King Dashratha assisted Indra in a battle against Shambra demon in Vaijanta. In this battle Dashratha was seriously wounded. His queen Kaikeyi saved his life by driving the chariot on which he lay unconscious. For her assitance, Dashratha granted her two boons. She did not seek anything then but later asked for bansihment of Rama for fourteen years and installation of Bharat as king of Ayodhya as her two boons.

Udayachal: A mountain of legendry concept behind which the sun is said to start rising in the skies.

Uma: 'light'. A name of Parvati, consort of Shiva.

Upanishads: Etymologically the word 'Upanishad' means the wisdom which when learned from *(upa)* a competent teacher completely *(-ni)* loosens and destroys *(-sad)* the pupil's attachment to the relative world. With one or two exceptions they form the concluding chapters of the Aranyakas. They are also known as Vedanta, the concluding chapters of the Vedas. The eleven major Upanishads are: Aitareya, *Taittiriya, Chhandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Mundaka, Mandukya, Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna,* and *Svetasvatara.*

Uttara Kanda: The seventh and last book of Tulsi's *Ramayana,* as also of the *Ramayana* of Valmiki. So named because the action described therein is Rama's journey northwards to Ayodhya and his coronation and rule.

Vaikuntha: Vishnu's heaven, abode of the gods.

Vaitarni: River of hell which the dead have to cross before entering the infernal regions. Represented as being full of torrents of blood and other impurities.

Valmiki: The Adi-kavi or first poet. The first composer of the *Ramayana.* According to legend Valmiki was first known by the name of Ratnakar. He lived in the forests with his wife and aged parents and often waylaid people travelling in the woods, depriving them of their riches. He thus supported the members of his family. One day Narada and Brahma were walking in the woods dressed as saints. Ratnakar stopped them to deprive them of their clothes. He made to hit them with an iron rod but was surprised to find that he could not lift the rod. Brahma gently stated that to rob was a sin and that he, Valmiki would have to suffer. Thereupon Valmiki replied that the reason for robbery was to sustain his ageing parents. Brahma commanded Valmiki to ask his parents if they condoned his actions. They did not, and Valmiki sought salvation by meditation. Brahma requested him to call the name of Rama, which eventually became the beautiful hymn—the first ever sung to Rama's

glory. Tulsidas always revered Valmiki.

Vamadeva: A celebrated Vedic rishi who was chief priest of Dashratha. Vashist and Vamadeva headed the eight famous sages who were treated as ministers of Dashratha to help him in administration of his kingdom according to dharma.

Vaman: The first *avatar* of Vishnu in Tretayuga and the fifth *avatar* in chronological order, the first fourt having manifested themselves in Satyayuga. One of the two *avatars* in the Brahmin form, the other being that of Parashurama. In the Vaman *avatar* the Lord Vishnu manifested Himself as a dwarf. See 'Avatars'.

Vanars: Residents of the kingdom of Kishkindha. Great warriors and possessing the quality of increasing or diminishing their forms. Said to have been born of gods and gandharvas.

Varuna: The sea god.

Vashist: Literally 'most wealthy'. According to Manu he was one of the seven great rishis.

Vishistadvaita: Qualified monism. Propounded by Ramanuja. sought to reconcile devotional thought with the monist position of Sankara.

Veda (Vedanta): Divine Knowledge. While there is little agreement regarding the date of composition of the Vedas, they were certainly composed earlier than 1500 BC. The Vedas concerning truths regarding the soul, the universe and Ultimate Reality are considered to be eternal and not ascribable to human authorship. They are thus considered to have originated from the breath of Brahma, Soul of the universe, revealed orally to rishis. The great sage Krishna Dvaipayana, also known as Vyasa, arranged the Vedas into four books called the *Rigveda,* the *Yajurveda,* the *Samaveda* and the *Atharvaveda.* The Vedas may be broadly divided into two parts : the Karma Kanda, which deal with rituals and sacrifices; and the *Jnana Kanda* which teach philosophical wisdom. The Upanishads are called the Vedanta. (See 'Upanishads')

Vedavati: Daughter of Kushdwaj, son of Brihaspati, guru of gods. Ravana tried to seduce her while passing through the Himalayas where she was doing penance to obtain Vishnu as her husband. The demon king had taken hold of her by her hair but she cut off her tresses by striking her fingers against them. She cursed Ravana with destruction, of which she would be the instrument in her next birth. Later she was born as Sita.

Vena: A mighty king who was proclaimed monarch of the world. In his vainglory he forbade giving gifts to Brahmins or making sacrifices to gods. Sages implored him to desist from impiety but when he did not pay any heed to them, they struck him with blades of grass consecrated by their prayers till he fell dead.

Vibhishana: Son of Visrawa muni and Kaikesi. Youngest brother of Ravana. Married to Sarama, daughter of Sailusha the Gandharva king. Proclaimed king of Lanka by Rama after the death of Ravana. Vibhishana had joined Rama and the vanar army after Ravana declined to heed his advice of making peace with Rama and sending Sita back to him.

Videha: Kingdom of Mithila, corresponding to Tirhut in North Bihar.

Vikatasya: One of the great warriors of the vanar armies.

Vina: A stringed musical instrument with hollow gourds attached at both ends. Narada muni is depicted with this musical instrument.

Vindhyachal: The mountain ranges which divide India roughly into the northern and southern halves. Rama dwelt for some time in ashrams of saints and sages in these hills before crossing the Narbada river to dwell at Panchvati.

Vinita: One of the wives of Kashyap. Mother of the race of birds. A dispute between her and Kadru, one of her co-wives, caused bitter relations between birds and snakes. (See 'Kadru').

Viradha: Son of the demon Java and Shathalda. As a result of severe penances, Viradha had obtained the boon of invincibility from Brahma. He challenged Rama and Lakshmana in the Dandaka woods seeking to take Sita captive.

Virata: Literally: splendour, beauty, gigantic, enormous. The term is used to describe the Infinite Form of the Lord.

Vishnu: 'To prevade'. The second god of the Hindu triad, representing the Preserver of the Universe and creation. Wife is Lakshmi or Sri. His abode is Vaikuntha, mount is Garuda, seat is a Lotus. Vishnu is given one thousand names, some of which are Hari, Keshava, Govinda, Murari, Nara-Narayan, Hrishikesha. He is said to have been sleeping on the milky ocean on a couch made by Ananta and dreamt creation of the Universe. As Preserver of the Universe and creation Vishnu incarnates Himself as an avatar when Divinity so choses for the welfare of His creation. (See avatars)

Vishwamitra: A learned sage who was initially a mighty king. Belonged to the family of King Kush son of the Prajapati. Kushnabh succeeded Kush and Kushnabh had a son known as Gadhi. Vishwamitra was the son of King Gadhi. While Vishwamitra fared into the country with his army, he once came to the ashram of sage Vashist. A dispute over his 'cow of plenty' led to a strife in which Vishwamitra was vanquished. (See 'Vashist). Thereafter Vishwamitra perform severe penances. He was however enamoured of the apsara Menaka who had been sent by Indra to seduce him and detract him from his penances. Shakuntala was born to them. Vishwamitra regretted having being lured away

from his penances and resumed his severe austerities. The gods sent Rambha the celestial apsara to seduce him, but he turned her into an image of stone to be redeemed by his erstwhile antagonist Vashist. Thus Vishwamitra became the most revered and celebrated of sages. He had four sons Havishpanda, Madhuspanda, Dridnetra and Maharatha. The great sage thereafter dwelt in Sidhashram and went to Ayodhya to bring Rama and Lakshman to guard the yajnas performed there. Apart from his deep learning the great sage was perfect in 'tapasya' and in the art and science of warfare and he gave lessons to Rama and Lakshmana while they dwelt in his ashram.

Vraja: The kingdom of Mathura in which Lord Krishna was born.

Vrajabhasha: The dialect or the language of Vraja in which many celebrated poets, including Tulsi, have composed famous literary works.

Vyasa: The great and celebrated sage Krishna Dvaipayana who arranged the Vedas into four books. Propounder of the system of philosophical thought contained in Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta. Author of the *Mahabharata,* the eighteen Puranas.

Yajna: A religious sacrifice; an oblation. Many forms of religious oblations were prescribed and were performed as *yajnas*. Amongst the main *yajnas* mentioned in the *Ramayana* are the Ashwamedha *yajna* performed by King Dashratha to invoke Divine Blessings for children to be born to his queens; the yajna performed by Vishwamitra over which Rama and Lakshmana held guard to prevent demons for defiling it; the *yajna* performed by Meghnad to invoke his deities for victory over Rama.

Yajnavalkya: A celebrated rishi, guru of King Janaka of Mithila.

Yakshas: According to legend when Brahma created life in the ocean he asked the creatures to look after the waters of the seas. Some of them declared that they would guard *(raksha)* the waters; others said they would worship *(yakshan)* the seas. Those who opted to guard the waters were known as Rakshas whilst those who worshipped them were called Yakshas. The Yakshas then became attendants of Kuvera and were given abode in Lanka. Later they were driven out by Ravana when he took a fancy to Lanka and asked Kuvera to vacate it.

Yama: Literally 'Restrainer'. Yama is the god of Death. Son of Vivaswat (the sun) by Sanyana. Yama is an object of terror. He has two insatiable dogs with four eyes and wide nostrils, guarding his abode. Guardian of the southern quarter. Assisted by his recorder and counsellor Chitragupta and waited upon by two attendants Chanda and Kal. Ravana once challenged Yama to fight him or to acknowledge defeat. Yama was on the point of destroying Ravana when Brahma interceded.

asking Yama to spare the demon king as he had granted him invincibility against gods. Yama respected Brahma's wishes and withdrew. Ravana thereupon presumed victory over the god of Death.

Yamuna: Daughter of the Sun god and hence sister of Yama. A tributary of the River Ganga, their confluence being at Prayag. The river has its source in Yamunotri in the Himalayas. Mathura, the birthplace of Lord Krishna is located on the banks of the Yamuna. Rama crossed the Yamuna near Prayag on his way to the woods during his banishment. Being the sister of Yama, Yamuna had obtained the boon that those who bathed in her waters would not be afflicted by Yama.

Yashoda: Wife of Nanda, friend of Vasudeva. Lord Krishna dwelt in Gokul as the son of Yashoda. Her own child born at the same time as Krishna was borne by her out of Divine Yogamaya and ascended into the heavens warning Kamsa that his destroyer had been born. Yashoda was thus unaware that Krishna was really not her child. Balarama, brother of Krishna, also dwelt with Yashoda at Gokul.

Yayati: So of King Nahush. Had two wives: Sharmishta, daughter of Vrashparva, a Daitya; and Devayanj, daughter of sage Sukracharya. Sharmishta gave birth to Puru and Devyani to Yadu. The king loved Sharmishta and her son Puru more than Devayani and her son Yadu. The sorrowing queen told her father Sukracharya of the king's lack of interest in her and the sage cursed King Yayati with old age. Thereupon Yayati transferred his old age to his son Puru and after living his life of worldly pleasures, took back his old age and made Puru his successor to the kingdom.

Yoga: Derived from a Sanskrit root which means 'to go to trance, to meditate'. The aim of yoga is to free *(viyoga)* man from the meshes of matter. It is one of the systems of Hindu philosophy founded by Patanjali, based on the Sankhya system whereby the individual soul may be united to the Universal Soul. Freed from the constituents of *Chitta*, namely : *Manas*, *Ahamkara* and *Buddhi*, human beings attain the *Svarupa* form. Yoga is acquired through the practice of eight disciplines: (i) *Yama*, or moral restraint: enjoining kindness to all and Ahimsa, truth in speech and action, shunning illicit gains or stealing, practising continence and celibacy, not being avaricious; (ii) *Niyama*, or observance, enjoining cleanliness in body and mind, contentment, practising ascetics and austerity, study of sacred books, devotion to God; (iii) *Asana*, or posture, as described in Hatha Yoga; (iv) *Pranayama*, or control of breath; (v) *Pratyahara*, or Abstraction, such that the senses do not come; in contact with their objects, thus being a state of inhibition of the senses; (vi) *Dharana*, or concentration, which follows abstraction; (vii) *Dhyana*, or meditation, is development of the capac-

ity to hold the mind continuously in the object of concentration; (viii) *Samadhi*, or contemplation when the self is lost to everything else and the object of meditation alone remains in the mind. The first five of the disciplines of yoga are external, the remaining three being internal.

Yogi: One who is engaged in the disciplines of yoga.

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[1]This nomenclature of dialogues is based on analysis of Anjaninandana Sharan in his commentary on *Ramacharitmanasa* in *Manas Piyusha*, p. 532. Other critics consider parts of Bala Kanda to be later additions have a different interpretation which is given on page xviii of Introduction.

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KQ-175-203

ISBN 9[illegible]15-0635-9

Munshiram Manoharlal
Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
New Delhi
www.mrmlbooks.com

9 788121 506359

ISBN 81-215-0634-4

9 788121 506342